

Lina Mukhamedjanova

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Chernigov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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Lina Mukhamedjanova is a pretty woman, short and slim, with short hair and blue eyes. She doesn't look her age. She is easy-going and cheerful. Lina lives in a three-bedroom apartment in a nine-storied 1970s building in the center of Chernigov. She has many pictures, photographs and books in her apartment. There is simple furniture. After we introduced each other, Lina asked me if I wanted a cup of tea or coffee, and after the interview she invited me to have dinner with her. She said she feels especially lonely when she has to sit at the table alone. I accepted her invitation. We had a nice dinner and kept talking about life, people, children and the future. Lina made the impression of a very calm and happy person.

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My family background

My father, Boris Braverman, came from Snovsk, a small Jewish town in Chernigov province.

[Editor's note: Snovks was renamed to Schors in 1935. Soviet authorities named the town after Nikolai Schors [1](#), a Soviet commander during the Civil War [2](#), and the town still bears this name.]

I've never been there, but my father told me that it was a picturesque town on the Snov River. The Jews lived in the center of the town, next to the railway station. They owned small stores and shops. There were shoemakers, tailors, glass- cutters and coppers in town.

My grandfather, Ghil Braverman was born in Snovsk in the 1870s. He owned a hardware store. I don't remember my grandmother's name. She died when she was still young, leaving my grandfather behind with five children. My father was the youngest. He didn't remember his mother very well. Grandfather Ghil was very religious. He was a handsome man with a big beard. He wore a kippah and prayed every day with his tallit and tefillin on. There were religious books at home, the Torah and the Talmud, which my grandfather read. On Saturdays my grandparents went to the synagogue in the center of town. They observed Jewish traditions, followed the kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Around 1915 the family moved to Chernigov where my grandfather bought a house. In 1916 my grandmother died. My grandfather grieved over her a lot. He didn't work like he used to because the Civil War brought pogroms [3](#) and destitution, so, maybe the family moved to Chernigov for that reason. The older children went to work to support my

grandfather and his younger children.

Although my grandfather's family was religious, his children - all five of them, including my father - grew up to become atheists. My father had four sisters: Basia, Fania, Sarra and Eva. They studied with a melamed and finished secondary school afterwards.

Basia and Fania had a tragic life. Both of them and their families perished on the first days of World War II. They were killed by fascists. Basia, born around 1890, was a beautiful and cheerful woman. She married Israel Livshytz, a Jewish man, who was her cousin. Israel was a highly qualified engineer. Basia was a housewife. They lived in Chernigov before the Great Patriotic War [4](#).

My father's sister Fania, born in 1895, married Iosif Linetski, a military commandant from Kiev. He was also a Jew. They lived in Kiev and had two children, a daughter called Inna and son called Evgeni. Fania's husband Iosif was arrested and executed without any trial or investigation [during the Great Terror] [5](#). Aunt Fania became mentally ill and was put into mental hospital in Chernigov. Her younger sister Sarra, born in 1900, took her children. She worked as an accountant after finishing a short-term course. Sarra remained single and dedicated her life to raising Fania's children.

My father's youngest sister, Eva, was born in 1913. She finished the Business Faculty at Moscow Aviation College. She married Alexei Yatsun, a Russian man, in Moscow and they lived a happy life together. During the war they worked at the aviation plant in Kuibyshev [Russia]. Eva died in 2000. Her daughter, Lina Ershova, is an economist. She lives and works in Moscow.

My father, Berko Braverman, was born in 1907. In the 1920s he changed his name to Boris, a Russian name [common name] [6](#). My father studied in cheder and finished two or three years in a Jewish elementary school. After his mother's death, he didn't continue his studies. However, since he was curious and gifted, he read a lot to educate himself. Grandfather Ghil taught him the basics of Yiddish and Hebrew. My father could read the Torah and the Talmud, but he was more interested in fiction. When he turned 12 he became an apprentice to a bookbinder. Of course, he read whatever he could lay his hands on. Later he worked as a shop assistant in a bookstore and became a very skilled expert in book supplies. Like many other young Jewish men my father got very fond of revolutionary ideas and dreamed of building a communist society. He joined the Komsomol [7](#), read a lot of classical Marxism- Leninism literature and sincerely believed in communist ideas. He joined the Communist Party in 1929. At one of the party meetings my father met my mother, Revekka Ostrovskaya, who had been involved in party activities for a few years.

Before the Revolution of 1917 [8](#) my mother's family lived in the small village of Kalygarka in Kiev region. I don't know anything about this village. My grandfather, Moisey Ostrovski, was born in the 1880s. He was a forest warden. Grandmother Pesia was also born in the 1880s and came from a wealthy merchant's family. Her father, Morduch Fridkin, was a grain dealer. Grandmother Pesia was educated at home like all Jewish girls. She could read and write in Yiddish, knew prayers by heart and was good at housekeeping. She had brothers and sisters, but I only knew one of them: her brother Isaac. I liked to look at his photograph. He was a courageous military man with a red cross on his sleeve. He was photographed when he served in the tsarist army in 1915. He was an assistant doctor. Isaac disappeared during World War I. He must have perished. One of my grandmother's sisters - unfortunately, I don't even know her name - lived in Chernigov and my grandparents often visited her. I only have their family photograph, which was taken during their

visit to Chernigov in 1912. They look like wealthy and beautiful people in this photo.

My grandfather's family was very religious. They observed all Jewish traditions. My grandfather had a number of religious books. He prayed every day, wore a kippah at home and a hat when he went out. My grandmother either wore a lace shawl or a wig to cover her head, according to Jewish laws. She told me that the family celebrated Sabbath and followed the kashrut. They had beautiful kosher crockery that my grandmother took out for Pesach. They celebrated all Jewish holidays, fasted on Yom Kippur and taught their children all Jewish traditions.

Their peaceful life ended in 1917 when the Revolution took place and was followed by the Civil War. Gangs [9](#) attacked their neighborhood and carried out pogroms. My grandfather's family found shelter in Ukrainian families. My grandfather's house was robbed. The bandits broke their beautiful kosher crockery and took away the silver tableware. But this wasn't the most terrible thing that happened. This disaster was a hard blow to my grandfather. He fell very ill and died in 1919 from a broken heart, as they called it in his time, or, from infarction to use a more modern language. I've never been to his grave, but I think he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kalygarka and that there was a Jewish funeral. It couldn't have been otherwise back then, particularly in religious Jewish families. My grandmother sold what was left and moved to Chernigov with her four children. She bought a small house. At some point she told herself, 'There's no God', and stopped observing Jewish traditions. She made a single exception for Pesach when she bought matzah and cooked delicious food: gefilte fish, chicken broth, stew and pudding from matzah flour. She didn't have any kosher utensils or crockery, though.

My grandparent's children grew up to become atheists, even though they studied with a melamed and finished Jewish elementary school when they were young.

My mother, the oldest, was born in 1906. After her came Naum, who was two or three years younger. Naum finished Agricultural College and lived his life in Chernigov. He worked for a grain supply company. Naum wasn't liable for military service due to his poor sight. He had a 'white card' [a release from the army]. He was in evacuation with his wife Sima and his daughters Alla and Anna. Naum died in Chernigov in the middle of the 1970s. He was buried in the town cemetery. His daughters and their families moved to Israel in the 1970s. Alla passed away in 2000. Anna and her family live in Haifa.

My mother's next brother, Lyova, was born in 1914. He was a student in a college in Leningrad when the Great Patriotic War began. He joined the Territorial Army and perished in the first days of the defense of Leningrad.

My mother's youngest sister, Genia, was born in 1918. She married a Russian man. My grandmother respected her daughter's feelings and didn't have any objections to this marriage. However, Genia didn't change her last name. To keep the memory of her father she remained Ostrovskaya for the rest of her life. Her husband, Dmitri Nutnikov, perished at the front. Genia, who had a daughter called Svetlana, never remarried. Her daughter died in the early 1990s and Genia and her grandson moved to Israel. They couldn't live together, so Genia, who had her leg amputated, spends the rest of her days in an old people's home.

My mother finished a Jewish elementary school. She could read and write in Russian and Ukrainian, but her mother tongue was Yiddish. She went to work at the stocking factory in 1918. There were

many young employees, and work at the factory changed her life. She had her hair cut and joined the group of young people that was fond of revolutionary ideas and the urge to build a new socialist society. My mother joined the Komsomol and became a member of the Communist Party in 1927. She was an active communist and within a few years she went to work in a district party committee where she met my father. They fell in love with one another and got married in 1931. Of course, a Jewish wedding was out of the question. They just had a civil ceremony and no wedding party.

Growing up

I was born on 16th October 1933. My communist parents named me Engelina, after one of the leaders of the world proletariat, Engels [10](#). They called me Lina at home. When I was to obtain my passport after the war I had the name of Lina written into it. I was born in a very hard year [during the famine in Ukraine] [11](#). My mother said she was afraid that I might not be born because she never had enough food when she was pregnant with me. However, I was born a small, but healthy girl.

We lived with Grandmother Pesia in a small house in Frunze [12](#) Street. There were two rooms and a kitchen with a Russian stove [13](#). There was a chicken house and a shed where the family kept a piglet. It goes without saying that there was no observance of any kosher rules in the family. On Pesach my grandmother cooked food from matzah that she bought at the synagogue. She only went to the synagogue to buy matzah once a year. There was no seder on Pesach, just a family gathering for dinner. There were no kosher dishes and my grandmother always recalled her beautiful kosher crockery that she had before the Civil War. There was horseradish, radish, chicken broth with 'galka' dumplings made from matzah flour. The house was thoroughly cleaned before Pesach. Clean curtains were hung up and the table was covered with a starched tablecloth. My grandmother said that one had to prepare for Pesach as one would for 1st May, but nobody told me what Pesach was really about. As for the other Jewish holidays, I didn't even hear about them.

My parents had many friends that visited us on 1st May and on October Revolution Day [14](#). They brought food and my grandmother did all the cooking. My parents also bought wine and lemonade that I liked tremendously. The adults partied and sang songs: Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish, and danced to songs on the radio. My grandmother mainly spoke Yiddish, but she also knew Ukrainian. My parents spoke Russian, but switched to Yiddish when they didn't want me to understand the subject of their discussion. However, my father often responded in Russian since he had forgotten much of his Yiddish. By that time he communicated in Russian for the most part. He read in Russian a lot and spoke Russian with his colleagues. Russian was the common language of communication.

My family was poor. We had simple furniture: a table, chairs, a wardrobe, nickel-plated beds and a worn-out sofa on which my grandmother slept. My mother was very proud of a big desk where my father often worked in the evening. My parents put sweets that my grandfather Ghil gave me into the drawers to have them last longer. My mother worked as a party secretary in a kindergarten and at school, but she wore casual clothes. She had one or two worn-out calico dresses and a fancy dark blue suit for all festive occasions. Her friends also had poor clothes. Modesty and poverty was almost the standard of a party official's life.

I don't remember 1937 when the arrests began. Many party officials and common citizens were arrested and executed or perished in Stalin's camps. My mother told me in the 1950s that my father, who was working in the scientific sector of the town party committee, was fired and expelled from the Party in 1937. Fortunately, they didn't go any further than expel him. My father went to work in a bookstore. He didn't even apply to have his party membership restored. I believe he got disappointed with the party ideals.

I went to kindergarten at the age of five. I didn't like kindergarten, especially because my grandmother was at home and I wanted to be with her. However, my mother insisted that I grew up with other children. Once I left the kindergarten and got lost. A militiaman stopped me and I told him my address and said that my last name was Oborvan [Russian for ragamuffin]. I was jokingly called so at home and must have associated this name with our last name, Braverman. The militiaman brought me home. My parents told me off and sent me to kindergarten again on the next day.

I had many friends that were all my neighbors. We all simply adored my father, who spent much time with us, children. He told us many interesting things about the Earth, the Moon, nature and its fauna. He also read books by children's authors to us. I remember a great party that my father arranged in our yard on New Year's Eve 1939. He put up a huge fur tree in the center of the yard and made a small playhouse for children underneath it. He also created ice slides. We celebrated New Year's in the yard, while the adults had a New Year's party in our apartment. They enjoyed themselves as much as usual.

My brother Edik was born in 1939. And, this was a kind of life we had before the war: we enjoyed ourselves and hoped for a better future. World War II put an end to our dreams.

During the war

We heard about the war on 22nd June 1941 at noon, when Molotov [15](#) spoke on the radio. On the following day my father received a call- up from the military office. He joined the army on 26th June. There was panic in town. People were buying off food, matches, salt and soap. My mother was at a loss, not knowing whether we should stay in Chernigov or leave. In late July Boris, our Jewish neighbor, came to see us. He tried to convince my grandmother to evacuate. He told her to go with her grandchildren since my mother, being a party official, had to stay in town as long as possible. He told my grandmother to pack everything we needed since we were leaving for good. I remember how scared I felt listening to him because my mother and grandmother repeated what they had heard on the radio or read in the newspapers: that the war was to be over soon. My grandmother packed two bags with clothes, cereals, books, toys and crockery.

My mother came from work and said there was a truck leaving from the party committee and we had to catch it. She was in such a hurry that she even forgot the only valuable thing that we had at home. That was my father's watch, which we left in the wardrobe. We also had leftover food that we packed: we only found a loaf of bread and some marmalade in one bag. The truck drove to our house. There was grandfather Ghil, my father's sister Basia and her children Betia and Felix, my mother's sister Genia and her daughter Svetlana. Genia's husband was at the front while Basia's husband stayed in town. He had to evacuate with his plant. He perished during an air raid on his way to evacuation. The mental hospital, in which my father's sister Fania was staying, failed to evacuate. The fascists shot its patients and personnel on the first days of the occupation of

Chernigov. Fania's children Inna and Evgeni and my father's third sister, Sarra, were also with us.

We left in late August 1941 when Chernigov was bombed and many houses were on fire. The driver was in a hurry and actually threw us onto the truck. On the way to the railway station the truck stopped several times to pick up women with children. At the railway station we boarded a train for cattle transportation. Our trip lasted about ten days. We were hungry. My mother gave us a marmalade candy and a small piece of bread. At bigger stations the train stopped and my mother and her sisters went to get some hot water. Sometimes they brought some soup or warm cereals that were provided to passengers of the train. We finally arrived at a kolkhoz [16](#) in Stalingrad region, 1,000 kilometers from home. I don't remember its name, but I remember how friendly the collective farmers were. We were accommodated in the house of a very hospitable woman. My mother and her sisters went to work at the kolkhoz. This was the harvest season and there were big crops. We, children, went to the bank of the Volga where we played with local children. The adults came from work late and were exhausted after a hard working day. We slept on mattresses on the floor. However, we could have plenty of vegetables, fruit, bread and cereals that the kolkhoz provided. We stayed there for two or three months. When it became clear that the war was going to last longer we decided to go farther east. We were afraid that fascist troops would soon arrive where we were staying.

We got on a train. We were on our way for two or three months. The train often stopped, we changed trains and often spent a few days at different stations. We were starving. We ran out of food and didn't have anything to exchange for food. My brother was crying from hunger, but I kept silent. We arrived at Sovkhozchi Papskiy kolkhoz, in Namangan region in Uzbekistan [3,200 km from Chernigov]. We suffered from cold and hunger. It was winter. We were accommodated in a clay wall hut. There was no work. This kolkhoz grew cotton and in winter there was no work to do. Shortly after we arrived, my aunt Basia drank water from an aryk [an artificial water canal]. She contracted typhoid and died. Her children, Felix and Betia, stayed with us for some time and then they left for Kuibyshev to stay with my father's sister Eva. Felix lives in Ufa now and Betia in Gomel. They have no children, probably because their parents were cousins. They send me greetings on my birthday and on New Year's.

Grandfather Ghil got ill. He missed his older daughter Basia very much. He was also worried about my father, who was at the front. We had no information about him. Grandfather Ghil died about two months after Basia passed away. As for us, I cannot understand how we survived this horrific winter. I can still see a shelf high up on the wall with nice-looking flat cookies on it. We, children, weren't allowed to eat them since they were made of very low quality millet and we could have fallen ill from them. Adults chewed on them and we, kids, only looked at them on that shelf. My grandmother added a small cup of flour to boiling water in a huge bowl to make food for us - it was called 'zatirukha'. In spring the situation improved a little. I picked goosefoot grass - I still hate it - to make soup. Aunt Sarra left for Kuibyshev with Fania's children Inna and Evgeni. Life was easier there since they worked at the aviation plant and received food packages. Sarra, Inna and Felix stayed in Kuibyshev after the war. In early 1960 we took Sarra to live with us in Chernigov. Sarra died in 1967. Inna has also passed away by now. Evgeni and his family live in Kiev.

In spring we moved to Gulbach, a settlement in Papskiy district, where we got a plot of land. We tried to grow vegetables there. Cabbage and potatoes didn't grow in this area. Local residents grew wheat or barley. Aunt Genia planted rice, but it didn't grow because there wasn't enough water. My

cousin and I picked mulberries from a tree near an aryk. Uzbeks suspected that we were stealing water, which was as precious as gold. One of them ran after my cousin and me with a whip and threatened that he would kill us if he saw us again. We grew millet that summer and were happy to have it. I went to pick brushwood in the fields. I made huge bundles of it and dragged them home. We grew corn and roasted it on the fire: this was incredibly delicious. I also went to gather salt at a swamp with adults. It had a bitter taste and we had to wash it many times before we could use it. I had numerous wounds on my legs that didn't heal from standing in salty water.

I went to primary school in Gulbach in fall 1942. I went to the Russian class. Our teacher had evacuated from Chernigov. I had excellent marks in all subjects. When we had tests, children from wealthier families sat next to me to copy what I was writing. They offered me food for giving them permission to copy the tests, but I was too proud to accept it. I was rather ashamed of our poverty. I had a friend called Tamara. I helped her to do her homework at her place. Her mother knew that we were starving and always offered me some food or just a glass of milk, but I never accepted anything from her and said that I wasn't hungry.

My mother first worked as a guard in Gulbach. She watched over cotton piles. Later she began to work at the accounting office of the sovkhos. She had meals at the canteen. She brought us soup with horsemeat that we liked. We received bread per coupons. The woman that handed out the bread felt very sympathetic with us. She gave my mother work to do: she had to put together all bread coupons for reporting purposes. My mother and I did this work at night and the woman gave us half a loaf of bread for it. My mother cut the bread into equal, small pieces to give it to the children. She cut a slice for herself, kissed it and gave it to me saying, 'Give it to Edik because he is the youngest of us'. My mother was always hungry, but she couldn't afford to even eat a small piece of bread.

Grandmother Pesia got ill in spring 1943. She was severely ill for a long time. My mother cried and said that my grandmother was going to die. When my brother and I came to say farewell to our grandmother she said, 'You've come too early to my funeral. Go away, I shall live longer'. She died on the following day. I didn't attend my grandfather or my grandmother's funeral, but I know that they were both buried in accordance with Jewish tradition and wrapped in a shroud. Some older Jewish men recited the Kaddish over my grandmother's grave.

I missed my father, my town, my home and my friends when we were in evacuation. I dreamed of a Ukrainian winter with snow. One morning I looked out of the window and saw something white. Being half asleep I decided it must be snow and ran outside, but it was only a big goose egg. Every day I ran outside to see the postman. We, kids, ran after him and were afraid to receive a death notification from him, but hoped to get a 'triangle' [letter] from the front. In summer 1943 the postman gave me a letter from my father. I ran to our house, yelling, 'Father is alive!'. We were happy and sent my father a long letter and photographs. He sent us a parcel with some clothes and soap that my mother exchanged for butter at the market. We put it on our gums to fight scurvy.

We stayed in the settlement until the end of the war. I remember 9th May 1945, Victory Day [17](#). All people ran into the streets, kissing, crying and hugging each other. My father came to take us home shortly after the victory. He was still in the army. He was a writing clerk in a tank brigade. He went as far as Moscow with us and from there he returned to his unit. We returned to Chernigov. Aunt Genia's husband's relatives lived there and we temporarily moved in with them. We slept on

the floor, but after all we had gone through in evacuation we were immune to hardships.

After the war

Our house was ruined. My father demobilized and we rented a 10- square meter room where we lived with Aunt Genia, whose husband perished at the front, and her daughter. My father went back to work at the bookstore and my mother became a secretary of the party organization in a hospital. I went to the 4th grade at school. I studied well and was an active pioneer and Komsomol member. I attended all kinds of clubs at school: singing, dancing, drawing, and poem clubs. I studied at a school for girls. There were girls of various nationalities at school. I didn't face any anti-Semitism at school, although I saw more than just one abusive graffiti reading 'zhyd' [kike] on the walls and doors. Life was hard after the war. There was another period of famine.

In 1948, during the anti-Semitic state campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [18](#), my father was accused of theft, arrested and imprisoned. Life became even more difficult. My mother made cereals or boiled potatoes and took some food to my father in prison. She kept crying, knowing that he would share this food, which was so hard to get, with other inmates of his cell. My father was released in 1950. He never spoke about his time in prison. It seemed that he had forgotten about it and lived his life as if it had never happened. Perhaps, he had some discussions with my mother, but it never happened in my presence. I didn't dare to ask him about something that must have been painful for him to recall.

My father couldn't get a job because nobody wanted to employ an ex- prisoner, so he went to Ternopol where he got occasional jobs. He returned to Chernigov some time before I finished school in 1952. My father resumed his job in the bookstore, but he was fired again. Then he got employed again. This happened a few times. They didn't explain why they were firing him, but it was clear that they did it because he was a Jew. They employed him when they couldn't do without him and then they fired him again. This went on until 1956. Afterwards my father worked with a bookselling company until he retired. My mother worked as the director of a nursery school, then she worked in a hospital and in a scientific research institute. She held administrative positions and was always a secretary of party organizations.

I faced anti-Semitism in 1952 when I tried to enter college. I passed my exams to Leningrad Medical College. I had an interview after passing my entrance exams. I noticed that Russian and Ukrainian applicants were admitted to the college while Jewish applicants - there were 14 of us - were told to come for an interview on the following day. We were so upset that one young Jewish man said that if he wasn't admitted; he would write to the United Nations Organization. It must have had its effect because this young man was admitted. The others weren't even allowed to have an interview. I entered Leningrad Communication College instead. I got accommodation in a hostel. I shared a room with three other students. We got along well and helped each other. I studied well. Then the Doctors' Plot [19](#) began and my co-students stayed away from me as if I had something to do with it. Stalin died in 1953 and I grieved after him. I didn't cry, but I was afraid of what was ahead of us and what we were going to do after the 'father of the people' had died.

After finishing college I got a mandatory job assignment [20](#) to the telephone company in Chernigov. I was to work as a telephone operator there. I loved coming back to my parents' home. Every now and then guys from the military unit in town called to chat at night in order to stay awake. Once I got an interesting call from a soldier. He began to talk about new books, music and

ballet to me. We talked for a while. When I worked the night shift next time he called again. He called every time when I was on night shift and we talked for hours. A month later he arranged a date with me. We met. He was a Tatar and his name was Shamil Mukhamedjanov. He was born in 1931. He was on military service in Chernigov. I liked him at once. I took Shamil to my home. He was polite and reserved. My parents liked him and didn't mind that he wasn't a Jew. When his service was over Shamil left for home. He wrote letters for two years, proposed to me and waited for my consent. I agreed to marry him. We had our wedding in Chernigov in 1957 and left for Guriev in Kazakhstan where Shamil's family lived. My mother-in-law was skeptical about me. A few years later she told me that she hadn't given Shamil her consent to marry me for a long time because I was of different origin. She was afraid that I would ridicule their customs and religion. She didn't care about my Jewish origin in particular - all she wanted was for Shamil to marry a Tatar girl.

My husband's family was religious. They were Muslims. My mother-in-law and Shamil's brothers weren't fanatically religious, but they prayed with their heads facing east. They read the Koran. It was very important to them to respect old people. They didn't work on religious holidays. They didn't eat pork. I didn't see other demonstrations of their religiosity. Frankly speaking, I never gave it much thought. My husband and I had our own life. Shamil told his mother that he wouldn't marry at all if he couldn't marry me. He was the oldest son and, according to Islamic law, the others could only get married after he was. My mother-in-law had to give in. She never regretted it and liked me a lot. I also treated their family nicely. Guriev was a small provincial town with pise-walled houses and small vegetable gardens near the huts. People were friendly and there were no nationality conflicts. Many Russians came to work in the town. New houses and educational institutions were being built. There was a mosque in the center of town where older people gathered on religious holidays. Younger people weren't religious and didn't observe any religious traditions.

I worked at the telephone station for some time. Shamil was a geologist and manager of a geological survey group. We rarely saw each other. Shamil only stayed at home in winter. Our daughter Natasha was born in 1958. She was a very sickly girl. The doctor said that she was having problems living in the continental climate of Middle Asia and that I should rather take her to my hometown. We took Natasha to Chernigov and she stayed with my parents. My mother worked, so we hired a baby-sitter for Natasha. My husband and I returned to Kazakhstan.

When we returned I joined Shamil's geological group and began to work as a time-keeping accountant there. I still enjoy recalling those years - they were probably the best years of my life. This geological group searched for oil. We were following seismic and mapping specialists to carry out the initial survey and the group following us did the in-depth survey. Everything was new and interesting to me. We lived in tents and cooked food on the fire place. We drank water from springs and lakes, baked bread and sang songs sitting by the fire at night. Shamil and I were very much in love. I never complained about anything. I felt good to be where he was.

We received a two-bedroom apartment in 1963. When Natasha was to go to the 1st grade at school my mother brought her to Kazakhstan. She waited until we returned from our expedition. She brought Natasha to school and took good care of her. We returned in October or November. My mother went back to Chernigov and Natasha stayed with us throughout the winter. In March my mother came to take Natasha to Chernigov with her. Of course, this was difficult for my mother. She was aging, but she was happy for us. Besides, Shamil and I earned well and sent her some

money.

My brother Edik finished secondary school with honors. He worked as a locksmith and then he finished Leningrad Technological College. When he was in his last year he married a Russian girl from Leningrad. Edik visited us in 1965. Upon graduation he got a job assignment in Vilnius and a room in a hostel, but his wife didn't want to leave Leningrad, her hometown. Edik told me that he decided that he couldn't go on living with her. She wasn't his friend, he realized. He believed that a family had to be a close union, like Shamil and I, based on love and understanding. Then my brother married Sonia, a Jewish woman from Chernigov. This marriage failed as well. I think he might have compared his marriages with me and my husband's and believed us to be the ideal family. Edik and Sonia have a daughter. Her name is Evgenia. She lives in Moscow. Edik lives in Moscow with his third wife Valentina now. They have a daughter, whose name is Elena. She studies in college and works.

I worked in expeditions for eleven and a half years and lived in Kazakhstan for 20 years. In 1965 I began to feel ill and my doctors recommended me to change the climatic zone. Shamil was transitioned to Chernigov and we returned to my hometown. We lived with my parents until we received an apartment. We worked together in a geological expedition. We were wealthy, had a car, traveled a lot all over the Soviet Union - the Baltic Republics, Subcarpathia [21](#) and the Far East - and spent vacations in the Crimea and Caucasus.

Everything was fine until Shamil suddenly fell ill in 1975. He had fever and swollen lymph nodes. He had terminal cancer. Shamil convinced the doctors to operate on him. After the surgery my husband lived two more years. He died in 1977 at the age of 46. I've lived alone since then. I believe there's no second man like him in this world.

My parents liked Shamil very much and grieved for him with me. We exchanged our two apartments for one to live together. My mother died in 1983. My father passed away in 1994. My parents were buried in the town cemetery, not in accordance with Jewish traditions. Their friends and acquaintances came to their funerals with flowers. They said speeches honoring my parents' memory.

In the 1970s many of my acquaintances moved to Israel, but I never considered emigration myself. I've always liked it here and I've had a good life. I never imagined living in a different country where people speak a different language. My husband is buried here. I have my friends here. I can't imagine life in a foreign country with different people and customs. I've always felt good about Israel though, and I wish this country prosperity and happiness.

My daughter graduated from the Faculty of Roman and German Philology at Simferopol University. She was a success with her studies. She knows Spanish, French and Italian. When she was a student Natasha married Victor Shulgin, a Russian man. Victor finished his postgraduate studies. Natasha stopped studying after they got children. Natasha thinks she is a metropolitan. She works at the university library. Her husband is chief of department at the university. They are a happy family and their children grow up in a loving and caring atmosphere. I have two grandchildren: Victor, born in 1982, and Alexandr, born in 1984. They both study at Simferopol University. The older one is a programmer, one of the best of the university, and the younger one is a mathematician. Natasha, her husband and her children often visit me in Chernigov. They support me materially and morally.

I was neither enthusiastic nor hostile about perestroika [22](#) in the 1980s. I've never cared about politics. Neither my husband nor I were members of the Soviet Communist Party. We never wanted to be. We had a good life and enjoyed our family life. Now I understand that it's good for Ukraine to be independent. Jewish life has revived and people have an opportunity to travel and run their own business.

I have many friends in Chernigov. I've never observed any Jewish traditions or celebrated holidays, but I've become a member of the Jewish cultural community. We celebrate Sabbath and learn prayers. On holidays Rabbi Yakov Muzykant comes to see us. Of course, I haven't become religious. I was raised by atheists at a time when religion was rejected. However, I like it that Jewish life is returning. I like to learn about Jewish traditions and holidays, which we celebrate in Hesed. I've always identified myself as Jew. Nationality has never been of major significance to me. Every nation has its scoundrels. I value personal qualities like kindness, honesty, and the capability to love and forgive. Now I've come to be interested in the history and life of my people. I'm interested in our traditions. There was no Jewish literature published in the former Soviet Union and there were no public Jewish organizations. I'm glad that we have an opportunity to return to our roots now.

Although my husband joined a better world so early, I feel happy. I lived a wonderful life with a loving and beloved husband and that's rare. Nationality doesn't matter as long as people love each other.

Glossary:

[1](#) Schors, Nikolai (1895-1919)

Famous Soviet commander and hero of the Russian Civil War, who perished on the battlefield.

[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](#) Pogroms in Ukraine

In the 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.

4 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.

5 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.

6 Common name

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yuri instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

7 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.

8 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.

9 Gangs

During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

10 Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895)

Philosopher and public figure, one of the founders of Marxism and communism.

11 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.

12 Frunze, Mikhail (1885-1925)

Soviet political and military leader.

13 Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

14 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.

15 Molotov, V

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

16 Kolkhoz

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

17 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

18 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti- Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

19 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.

20 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

21 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro- Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to

Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

22 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.