Zhenia Kriss

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Kiev,
Ukraine
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Charna Kriss is an intelligent and sociable woman. She lives with her husband, Isaac Gragerov, in a nice spacious apartment. She is very ill and can only walk with two sticks, but she is very sociable kind and hospitable. She likes to talk about her occupation, science and the medications that she developed. It's a pleasure to talk with Charna. One can feel that she has had an interesting life full of events and accomplishments.

Family background

My mother, Sima Kodrianskaya, came from Makarov, a small town in Kiev province [50 km from Kiev]. It's a district town now. Before 1917 its population consisted of Jews, Russians and Ukrainians. There were synagogues and churches. During the Great Patriotic War 1 many Jews were exterminated by the fascists, and the rest of them moved out of town after the war. The only information I have about my mother's parents is that her father's name was Yankel Kodrianskiy. I don't know my grandmother's name, or my grandparents' occupation, or what kind of life they had. None of their children had any education - (they were all craftsmen -) so my mother's parents must have been very poor people. They died in 1905, one after the other, when my mother was 10 years old. My mother never answered any questions about my grandparents. It was probably too hard for her to recall them, or she probably couldn't remember much considering her age when they died. After they died, my mother was raised by her older sisters and brothers.

My mother's older brother, Zeidel Kodrianskiy was born in 1885 and he was a laborer. After the Revolution of 1917 2, when the family moved to Kiev, he took on a job as a loader in a store. His wife died in the early 1930s. During the war Zeidel's sons, Monia and Zinoviy, went to the army, and his daughter, Malka, and her family lived in the vicinity of Moscow. Zeidel couldn't go into evacuation, and he didn't want to either. He had severe eczema. His body was covered with abscesses and wounds. He was confined to bed. On 29th September 1941, when the 'zhyds [kikes] of Kiev' were ordered by German command to go to Babi Yar 3 and were shot there, Zeidel stayed at home. He didn't know anything about the order, and besides he couldn't walk. After a few days Zeidel's Ukrainian neighbors - they had become policemen during the fascist regime and were drunk -) dragged the poor man down into the yard, beating and whipping him until he became

quiet. They left him dying in the dust of the yard. Our neighbors told us this story. They watched the incident but were afraid to come to my uncle's defense and stop the murderers.

My mother's second oldest brother, Shloime, born in 1888, was a tailor. He was a quiet man and spent day and night working on his sewing machine. His wife, Hava, helped him with his work. They had two small children. During the Civil War 4, when the Whites 5, Reds 6 and Greens 7 raged in Ukraine, my Uncle Shlome was killed by bandits. Hava and the children moved to Kiev almost immediately after his murder. I don't know what happened to them after that.

My mother's third brother, Gershl, born in 1890, had three children: two daughters, Rachel and Charna, and a son, Munia. Munia was at the front during the Great Patriotic War. After the war he moved to Leningrad and married a Russian woman. Gershl, his wife and his daughters were in evacuation during the war. After the war they returned to Kiev. Gershl died in the early 1960s. Rachel and her children live in America, and Charna lives in Kiev.

I didn't know my Aunt Beshyva very well. She was my mother's older sister and died before the Great Patriotic War. My mother's other sister, Nehama, died during a pogrom in Makarov in 1918.

As far as I know my mother's brothers or sisters didn't go to the synagogue. They weren't religious, and they didn't observe any traditions or celebrate holidays. They were very poor, so poor that they couldn't even give my mother a home and food when their parents died. Getting education was out of the question. My mother had to become a servant: she washed floors, did laundry and looked after the children of richer Jewish families. Her masters treated her well, though. They were mostly distant relatives or acquaintances of the family. After a few years Shloime took my mother into his family. She became his apprentice and helped Hava and him with their work. During that horrific pogrom, when Shlome was murdered, Hava, her children and my mother were hiding in a haystack near town. After the pogrom my mother moved to Kiev with Hava and the rest of the family. In Kiev they rented a very small apartment in Podol 8. My mother lived with them for several months. She met a clerk from a wood store - Haim Kriss - whom she married in 1919.

My grandparents on my father's side, Pinhus and Rukhl Kriss, came from the small town of Sidelkovo in the north of Ukraine, near its border with Belarus. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living in Sidelkovo, but in Kiev, where he moved to at the beginning of the 20th century, he owned a wood storage. This was solid business because wood was always in demand, and he could provide well for his family. After the NEP 9 was over the authorities expropriated his facility. My grandfather was declared a nepman and deprived of his electoral right. He didn't get another job. My grandfather Pinhus was a very religious man. He spent his days studying the Torah and Talmud at home. He went to the synagogue in Podol every day where he had his own seat. They followed the kashrut in the family and celebrated Shabbat and all the Jewish holidays.

My grandmother Rukhl was a housewife. They had seven children: six daughters and a son, my father. They were all born in Sidelkovo, but lived in Kiev from their early childhood years. They got education at home. My father's sisters and my father were moderately religious. They tried to observe the main rules and traditions. They only went to the synagogue on holidays, but they prayed regularly and celebrated all holidays at home. They didn't follow the kashrut, though. They spoke Yiddish at home, but they all knew Russian.

My father's older sister, Rosa, born in 1888, was a housewife. Her husband, Yufa, was a clerk. During the war Rosa, her husband and their daughter, Asia, were in evacuation. Their son, Anatoliy, perished during the war. Rosa died in the middle of the 1960s. Asia lives in Saint-Petersburg.

The next child in the family was Clara Waisberg (her family name). Her son, Munia, perished at the front during the war in the 1940s, and her daughter, Beba, who was very ill in evacuation, died shortly after the war. Clara died in Kiev in the early 1950s.

The next sister, Hana, was born in 1892. She was well educated and read a lot, the only problem was that she was deaf. She therefore didn't work and lived with one of her sisters. She lived with us for a while, too. She was single and died in the early 1970s.

Pesia was born around 1897. Pesia was written in her passport, but everybody called her Lena. She was the next child after my father. She graduated from a medical institute. During the war she worked in the hospital in Fergana, Uzbekistan. She died in the middle of the 1950s. The next child was Enta, (whom everyone called Lyolia). She worked as a conductor in streetcars in Kiev. She died in the middle of the 1960s. Lena and Lyolia were single. They both lost their loved ones to the war.

The youngest child, Olga ((Golda in Yiddish),) was born in 1905. She wasn't very young any more when she got married. Her husband perished during the Great Patriotic War, and her baby died on the train when they were on their way into evacuation. She didn't marry again. Olga died in Kiev in the middle of the 1970s.

My father, Haim Kriss, was born in Sidelkovo in 1893. I don't know what kind of education he got. (I believe, he only had classes with his tutors at home), but he was a pretty educated and intelligent man. He worked as a clerk at his father's wood storage. He had to know the basics of this business to do his work well. My parents met in the store when my mother came to buy some wood.

They got married in 1919. It was at the height of the Civil War, and they only had a small wedding with their closest relatives. But it was a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street. This was one of the biggest synagogues in Kiev, a beautiful two-storied brick building. Although my parents weren't religious they had no alternative. They had to obey their families' wish and accept all religious rituals to be performed at their wedding, according to the rules that have been observed over centuries.

My parents rented a tiny apartment, (with one small room and a kitchen,) in Podol. I was born in this apartment on 23rd February 1920. I was named Charna at birth, but I didn't know my real name until the middle of the 1980s when I obtained a copy of my birth certificate. My parents called me Zhenia, and I was sure that my real name was Evgenia [Zhenia is affectionate for Evgenia]. In 1922 my brother, Froim, was born.

Growing up

My earliest memories go back to the time when I was five. My father was also declared a nepman and deprived of his electoral right - just like my grandfather. It was terrible that nobody wanted to employ him. He had to work as a loader or cart man for the rest of his life, even though he was an educated and intelligent man. It was hard physical work and he needed to be strong.

My father grew up in a religious family and observed Jewish traditions. I remember him sitting by the stove in our apartment, putting small pieces of pork fat on sticks and frying them over the fire. He kept saying, 'If there is a God, he is smart and understands that I have to eat pork fat to be strong, and that I need to be strong to keep my job, because if I loose it my kids will die'. This was his only breach of Jewish rules. He had a tallit and tefillin that he put on to recite a prayer. He prayed in a corner of the room every morning. We celebrated Pesach, Chanukkah, Purim and Rosh Hashanah in our family. My father didn't fast before on Yom Kippur, though. It would have been too hard for him.

My grandfather Pinhus or my mother's sisters usually invited our family on big holidays, because we were very poor, and my mother didn't have money to cook a festive meal. My grandparents lived not far from where we lived. I remember our parents asking us to be quiet when my grandfather conducted the seder rituals at Pesach. He was a serious man and couldn't bear any disturbances during religious rituals. I never saw my grandmother sitting down quietly. She was constantly doing something: cooking or treating somebody to a meal, washing or cleaning. She was thin and always wore a shawl. She obeyed her husband. I cannot remember any delicacies in their house, but there was always sufficient food, even if there wasn't any meat or fish. My grandfather died in 1935. I know that he was buried according to Jewish tradition. I remember a number of men with beards and payes, wearing black hats and black outfits, who prayed several days after my grandfather's funeral. My grandmother Rukhl died in 1937.

We lived a very poor life. My father worked until late carrying heavy loads. When he came home he was very tired and went to sleep. My mother sewed at home. I assisted her doing minor tasks. My mother had a hard life, but she was a very nice and kind person, she sympathized with other people and always tried to help them. She also supported Hava, Shloime's wife. She made clothes for her children and often sent me to take little treats to them. My mother had no education, but people liked her for her kindness. My mother was a good singer. We lived in the basement of the house and there were often people near our windows listening to my mother singing while she was doing her work. She sang Jewish and Ukrainian songs and Russian ballads. Once a stranger came in, charmed with her singing. He told her that she had a wonderful voice and could enter a conservatory and that he would help her to do it. My mother declined telling him that she had to support her husband and raise their children.

My parents spoke Yiddish at home. My father intended to raise us religiously, although he violated Jewish rules every now and then. Only boys were given education in Jewish families and when my brother turned five our father hired a teacher for him to teach him Jewish laws, traditions and rituals, and the Talmud and the Torah, at home. But the teacher's efforts were fruitless. Froim wasn't successful in his studies. I was in the same room and tried to explain tasks to him, but he told me that studying always made him feel sleepy. Our playmates in the yard were Young Octobrists [10] and pioneers, they sang merry patriotic songs and played ball. All this seemed so much more interesting and important than boring religious studies. We were growing up in an atheist surrounding, and my father realized that he wouldn't be able to turn my brother into a faithful Jew.

In 1930 my mother had another baby, Inna. Inna was born with Down syndrome and couldn't speak or walk until she was four years old. My parents gave her a lot of care. They loved her dearly and took every effort to get any possible treatment for her. And, she survived!

I started school when I was seven. It was a Russian lower secondary school - (seven years of studies) - that soon became a higher secondary school (with ten years of studies). There were Jewish schools in Kiev, but my parents believed that I would avoid language problems in my further education if I went to a Russian school. Our school was housed in several buildings. At first it was in a mansion that housed cultural associations of foreign countries, and then in the building of the cultural center until they built a new building near the hospital for workers [eit was a Jewish hospital before the Revolution of 1917 and now it is a regional hospital]. In 1928 my brother began to study at the same school.

I had a few Jewish classmates. The other children in my class were of various nationalities. We were all friends and our teachers were nice to us. I enjoyed studying and finished school with honors. I was an active pioneer and, later, a Komsomol 11 member. I was secretary of our school Komsomol unit. I conducted Komsomol meetings, arranged competitions between different classes, worked on improvement in studies and arranged the collection of waste paper and scrap. I took part in district and town Olympiads in chemistry, physics and mathematics. In 1937 my portrait was on the Board of Honor for the most advanced people in our neighborhood. I was very proud of it. This board was located in the park planted by pupils of our school, in front of the Rus cinema. We celebrated 1st of May and the Day of October Revolution Day 12 at school and attended parades. We enjoyed singing Soviet songs. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. However, my friends liked to get together at my home after parades where my mother treated them to delicious pies that she was the best at making.

Only my mother's cooking skills helped us to survive the famine of 1932-33 [famine in Ukraine] 13. By that time we were living in a one-bedroom apartment in a two-storied building. We had moved there in 1930, after our house was pulled down to create a construction site for the Arsenal Plant [the biggest military plant in Ukraine]. There was a kitchen and one room in our new apartment. The toilet was in the yard. There was a stove in the kitchen for heating the room, which my mother also used for cooking. During the famine my mother made pancakes from potato peels, and we also had sunflower seed wastes. Once my mother bought some cutlets at the Lukianovskiy market near our house. She bought them for our father, who needed some meat to be strong enough to work. My father had them and afterwards heard rumors that those cutlets were made of human flesh. He was sick for a whole week after he heard this. We sometimes got buns and small pies at school. They were brought to school from the Arsenal Plant and the cable plant that were supporting our school. Several times a military unit, located near our school, invited us to their canteen where we had delicious soup. It was so great to have a bowl of soup at that time.

This period was very hard for my father. He was haunted by two feelings for his whole life - the feeling of guilt towards his wife and children and the feeling of fear. My father felt guilty that he couldn't provide better for us, as he was actually deprived of the right to have a good job he deserved and received a miserable salary instead. This feeling of guilt became stronger during the famine. He believed that it was his fault that Inna was born an ill baby. He thought it had happened because his wife didn't get enough food when she was pregnant. As to his feeling of fear - he couldn't sleep because he feared that authorities would recall that he had been declared a nepman and would put him into an even worse situation.

In the late 1930s, during the period of arrests of innocent people [the so- called Great Terror] 14, my father didn't sleep at all. Every night he said 'goodbye' to us in his thoughts fearing that he

would be arrested. Fortunately, nobody in our family was arrested - we were too insignificant for the authorities. But the nightmare of people being arrested and the suffering of their relatives was all around us. There was Lukianovskaya prison across the street from our house, and a shipment railway station from where trains full of prisoners were sent to prisons and camps was just nearby. Prisoners' relatives came to our garden and our house begging us to let them stay. They were hoping to see their loved ones for the last time on their way to the station, escorted by security guards and watch-dogs. We often saw prisoners boarding trains. Militia often came to our house to tear people away from our place. I felt sorry for these people, but I believed that they must be true 'enemies of the people' if they were arrested. Some lecturers and students vanished from the university where I studied. Our favorite teacher in physical culture, Benesh, was arrested. He was a Hungarian and a very educated and intelligent man. He vanished just like so many others.

After finishing school with honors in 1937, I entered the Faculty of Chemistry at Kiev State University without taking exams. When I was a first- year student I became a member of the Komsomol committee of the university. I was responsible for cultural and social activities. I arranged lectures, issued a wall newspaper and had lots of errands to do. I had a nice group of friends. We got together at my friend Ida's place. Most of us were Jewish. I especially liked one of them - Isaac Gragerov, a third-year student. We were fond of theater. Our favorites were the Red Army Theater and the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theater. There were Soviet performances glorifying the Soviet way of life and communism. Sometimes there were classical performances, but they also had a touch of Soviet propaganda against capitalist society. We also went to the cinema. Of course, those films and performances were of patriotic subjects, but the actors were very good. I liked reading most of all. We had a neighbor that worked at the Lukianovskaya prison. His name was Nikolay Bereg. He arranged a permit to the library of Lukianovskaya prison for me. It turned out to be a very good library. I borrowed great books from there: books by Russian and foreign writers and many historical books. I found it strange that the prison had such a wonderful library, because the inmates weren't even allowed to read.

We [Komsomol members] were educated people and had information about fascism and about the war, which was a real threat to European countries. We were aware of Hitler's views and saw the film Professor Mamlock 15. But I got really frightened when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 16 was signed. Although the official propaganda stated that it was an assurance against Hitler's aggression, I thought it was very dangerous to come to any agreement with fascists and that the signing of this pact was a precursor of war in itself.

In 1939 a one-year course for reserve nurses was established at the university. I was secretary of the Komsomol organization and was responsible for enrollment to this course. The best way was to be the first to enroll and I did so, although I was scared of everything related to medicine: injections, blood or dissection rooms. All girls in our group followed into my footsteps. I was very good at theory, and at training classes my friends were giving injections and applying bandages for me. After finishing this course we received certificates that said we were reserve nurses. We also had civil defense training at which we were taught to use gas masks and put out firebombs. In general, the country was preparing for a war.

During the War

But the war caught our people unawares. I was in the town of Rubezhnoye, Donetsk region, where we [fourth-year students] had training at the chemical factory, when the war began. We headed home immediately. Trains were overcrowded, and it took us a while to get home. People were going back from business trips and vacations to reunite with their families. I stayed at home for two days. We were sent to harvesting in Poltava region. At that time many people thought that the war was going to be over soon and that it was just a terrible confusion and our army would win. We, students, understood that harvesting was our important contribution.

We worked at Lemeshovka village [120 km from Kiev]. Our group of girls sorted tobacco leaves. We were to hang tobacco leaves on poles in the sheds and cut smaller leaves. Once I heard a man's voice calling my name. It was Isaac Gragerov. He was an army recruit already and had stepped out of his march while on the way to a training camp to find me and say 'goodbye'. My friend Ida Mahagon was in love with him, and I decided to take him to her. Isaac was a reserved man. He had never told me about his love, but this time he looked at me and said, 'Zhenia, it's war and I'm going to the front. I've come to say goodbye to you.' And he stressed this 'to you'. I understood his feelings then, but I didn't feel the fear that we might never see each other again. I said 'goodbye' to Isaac, and he ran to catch up with his unit. This happened in August 1941.

After a few days it became clear that the front was moving closer. We could hear explosions and the roar of war. I went to the central facility of the collective farm, where we were working, looking for our fellow students. It turned out that our rector, Gusko, lecturers and some students had left for Kharkov a few days before, forgetting about us. That was when I got scared! We didn't have any documents or bread cards. The other girls sent me to the university in Kiev, as I was the leader of our Komsomol unit. It never occurred to me that it was dangerous to go alone, and none of them offered to keep me company. I felt it was my duty to take care of my friends. I reached Kiev by taking trains whenever possible and going on foot.

I came home. The ceiling in the kitchen had fallen down after a bomb explosion near our house. There was a note from my parents on the table. It said that Froim had gone to the front and that they and my sister had gone into evacuation. My father wrote that they would try to reach Fergana where my father's sister Lena 0was working at the hospital. I walked to the university. There was military training in the yard. Some students that were not recruited to the army were preparing to join the Territorial Army. I saw Aunt Rosa's son and my cousin, Anatoliy Yufa. He was blinded in one eye by a slingshot when he was a child and was unfit for the army. Anatoliy took part in the defense of Kiev with a group of volunteers from university. Almost all of them perished. Anatoliy returned to the city, which was already occupied, and was hiding in an attic where his schoolmate had taken him. Shortly afterwards this same schoolmate reported him to the Germans, and Anatoliy was shot at Babi Yar.

In August 1941, when I came to the university, I obtained evacuation documents for the rest of the girls, bread cards and cards for 400 grams of candy. Before leaving Kiev I went to see my Uncle Zeidel to take him with me. He refused to leave. He couldn't even move, because his whole body was covered with abscesses.

I went to Lemeshovka by changing from one train to another. My friends were waiting for me there. We went to Kharkov on foot. On the way I walked until my feet were covered in blisters and couldn't go on. I decided to wait for a train at the railway station of Lemeshovka. My friends left me

again. My best friend Ida Mahagon said, 'I understand that we cannot leave you here, but I'm too scared to stay. If we get captured by the Germans we won't be able to escape'. I stayed alone on the platform at nighttime. I was lucky. A train full of soldiers arrived. They pulled me inside, and soon I caught up with the girls again. Changing vehicles we reached Kharkov on the third day. It became clear there that the university was preparing for evacuation in Kzyl-Orda.

Kiev was occupied, and it was clear that the Germans were coming to Kharkov. Other girls and I went to the mobilization office to volunteer to the front. We were told that students had to continue their studies and weren't allowed to recruit. I found Isaac's relatives in Kharkov and told them that I was going to join my parents in Fergana. I left the address of the hospital with them for Isaac. We still didn't believe that the fascists would go too far in our country and we, 12-13 girls, headed to Konstantinovka in Donbass where a brother of one of the girls worked as chief engineer at the chemical factory. We were hoping to get a job there. In Konstantinovka we only met this man's wife with her baby. She told us that he had been recruited to the army, and the factory was getting ready for evacuation. We helped her to get packed to go to her relatives in the country. Then we went to the railway station.

Changing trains we headed to Kzyl-Orda where we knew the university was going to evacuate to. We slept in railway cattle-cars. We were dirty, freezing and starving. We got off near the town of Engels in Saratov region [1,250 km east of Kiev]. It was the capital of the German Volga region. The town was empty. Nice and clean houses were empty. We were struck by this emptiness. We didn't know that the Germans had been deported to Kazakhstan, just like some other nationalities that the authorities had found suspicious, 13 as soon as the war began. They didn't have time to pack their luggage and left all their belongings behind. We washed ourselves in one of the houses and found some clothes. There was nobody to ask permission to take the clothes, so we changed and moved on.

After about three weeks we had covered another 300 km on passing vehicles or on foot and reached Kzyl-Orda at night. Kzyl-Orda was a small town in a desert in Kazakhstan, Middle Asia. Its population was Kazakh. Kazakh people had no education and led a patriarchal way of life. We fell asleep on the railway platform. I woke up at night and saw a moving whitish tape. I took a closer look and saw that these were lice. I woke up my friends. We left the station and fell asleep in a park nearby. It got very cold at night, and some of us fell ill. The girl whose brother we looked for in Konstantinovka had a high fever, and we took her to hospital. I left the most precious thing that I had with me - my mother's woolen shawl - with her.

We went to the town which was located about 20 km from the railway station. We found out that the university wasn't going to open for a while, because it was difficult to find sufficient facilities for both the Kharkov and Kiev universities in such a small town. I decided to go to the place where my parents were. I asked my fellow students to notify me as soon as the university would begin to operate. I covered over 800 km to Fergana on foot and any transport, train or a vehicle, driving this direction.

I found my parents and sister in Fergana. They lived in a small plywood hut that had served as a shed for silk worms. My father's sisters also lived nearby. Aunt Lena worked at the hospital. There was a hospital deployed at the Kuwasai station near Fergana, and Aunt Lena found me a job as a nurse there. Soon the hospital was converted into a mobile military hospital and sent to the front.

Near Kharkov the train was bombed, and I was scared of the horrors of the war. Survivors and personnel moved to Markelan, which was not far from Fergana. I had a small wound on my right leg, but I recovered soon and returned to my duties.

The hospital became a typhoid hospital. Our patients were soldiers and officers. I had to learn how to give injections, dress wounds and assist doctors - I had to do everything that I had been so afraid of doing before. The thing was that only Valia Shulman and I had some medical training. The others working there were girls that had just finished school. I became a member of the Communist Party in this hospital. It was easy to become a party member during the war. They admitted all people that had been at the front. I wished to belong to the advanced part of society, to be a communist, to fight the enemy. There were a few girls, overwhelmed with the feeling of patriotism. The leader of the party unit conducted a meeting where he handed our party membership cards over to us without any special ceremonies. We took an oath to be patriots and defend our motherland.

One evening I bent over a Polish patient and felt a bite on my forehead. It turned out to be a typhoid louse. Shortly afterwards I fainted. I had typhoid with complications: pulmonary edema, encephalitis and phlegm on the leg that had been wounded. The doctors were going to amputate my leg, but fortunately there was a talented surgeon from Leningrad in this hospital, whose wife and child had perished in the blockade of Leningrad 17 some time before. He performed a surgery on my legd and saved it.

I received quite a few letters from friends while I was ill. There was one from Isaac. There was so much love and care between the lines of this letter that I didn't even care to answer letters from other young men. I understood that Isaac Gragerov was the gift of my life. After about two months I resumed my work duties, although I was so weak that I fainted every now and then. Then I received a letter from the university, inviting me to come back to resume my studies. I wanted to continue my studies, but I felt sorry to leave the hospital. I had a discussion with the director of the hospital, and he promised to notify me as soon as the hospital would be ordered to the front again.

I arrived at Kzyl-Orda a month before New Year's Eve of 1942. I settled down in a hostel, passed my exams and took to my diploma thesis. I also worked at a shop established by professors of the university. I defended my thesis. Its subject was the generation of spirits from wastes of Kzyl-Orda rice. At that time I received a letter from the director of the hospital telling me that they were to be sent to the front. He also specified the time when their train would be passing Kzyl-Orda. Letters took a long time to reach their destination in wartime, and it turned out that their train was to arrive at Kzyl-Orda half an hour after I received the letter. I ran to the station to catch the train. I didn't have any documents with me, and they didn't have the right to take me along without documents. I asked the conductor to keep the train for two hours for me to get my documents. When I came back the train was gone. I was awfully upset and still have the feeling of hurt and loss. I worked in Kzyl-Orda for a few months when I got assigned to the position of head of laboratory at the iodine and bromine factory on Chiliken Island in Turkmenistan. My friend wrote a poem about our life in Kzyl-Orda that I still keep. It is an accurate description of our life there.

Some time we shall have a cup of tea and will recall like an old anecdote the brew we had at the hostel in the year of 1943 that we shall remember. The weather so freezing that even dogs tried to hide away. Macaroni soup once a day that was hard to get. And bread that was so little that we

could feel no taste of it. Two spoons for the four of us and one bed for two. An oil lamp on a dark evening in the fall. Porridge with melon on Sunday, spiced with smoke for misfortune, And Zhenia's ballads in the evening, oh, yes, she does sing well. And her concert gets straight to the sole especially when the stomach is empty. We read Green before going to bed and Kuprin books aloud, And had a life with no makeup, no holiday drunkenness or wine. We were sober after parties and discussions, We drank tea from shaving sets and ate bread that we had saved. Some time at tea, under a lampshade where it is as bright as on the brightest day, We shall recall the brew in the hostel and make a mention of our friendship with a kind word. .

I arrived on Chiliken Island in a fisherman's boat. We came across the Caspian Sea from Krasnovodsk to this island - now it's a peninsula. There were iodine deposits and deposits of other chemical elements on Chiliken. In the 1930s a big factory was constructed there. It wasn't a big island. There were just a few villages, two or three stores, one school and an iodine-bromine factory. The majority of the population of this island worked in this factory. They were Turkmen. They were very poor people that had no education, but there were also employees from other areas. There were also few of us that had been sent to this factory on assignment upon graduation from higher educational institutions.

There was sand on this island, clear seawater and bright sunlight. There was one saxaul tree, and local schoolchildren came to look at it to see what a tree looks like. I stayed in the hostel. Although there wasn't enough drinking water and bread, no books, theaters and cinemas, I recall this period of my life with pleasure. There weren't enough qualified engineers at the factory, and I had to conduct training classes in mathematics, chemistry and physics. I was also elected secretary of the Komsomol unit of the factory. I was responsible for amateur clubs - dancing and theatrical groups and choirs - to make our dull life more colorful. We cooked at the hostel in the evenings and had meals together.

There were eleven other tenants in my room in the hostel. These girls were of various nationalities and came from different areas of the country, but we got along well. We supported each other and shared all food that we had. My job assignment lasted three years. I was a good employee and after three years had passed my management was very reluctant to let me go. My manager promised me promotion and further transfer to Moscow, but I dreamt of seeing my beloved Kiev again. I hadn't heard from Isaac for a long time. I had no information about him and was hoping to see him in Kiev. I had to make a plot. I had a friend, former partisan, David Shakhnovskiy. He had been in love with me a while ago. He went to my management in Moscow and said that he was my husband and wanted his wife back home. They let me go, and I returned to Kiev in 1946. It was in ruins after the war, but how I longed to see my city!

After the War

My parents and my sister had returned to Kiev from Fergana a month before I did. Our house had been destroyed by a bomb and they were living in the kitchen with our distant relatives. I moved in with them. Later a room in a shed in the same yard got vacant, and my parents moved in there. It was a small hut but all of us - my parents, my sister, my brother and I - lived in it. My brother was a war invalid and after some time he received an apartment from the plant where he worked.

In 1946 food was rationed. I began to look for work after I returned. I had received a small allowance when I quit my job on Chiliken Island, but I was spending it rapidly. My nationality - (it

was called Item 5 18 -) was in my way wherever I went. When I went to inquire about a vacancy I was told there was one, but after I left my documents it turned out that there was no vacancy any more . It went on like this for a while. Once I visited the chemical laboratory at the Arsenal Plant asking if there was a vacancy. I was refused. When I left the egress checkpoint I saw Isaac. 'What are you doing here?' I asked him. 'Waiting for you,' he replied. He was a post-graduate student in Moscow and was working on his thesis. When he came from Moscow he found my parents, and they told him where I was. We hugged each other and went for a walk to the banks of the Dnepr River.

We got married a few months later. We had a civil ceremony and started moving my belongings to Isaac's parents, who had an apartment in a house within the area of the leather factory. We were detained by a drunk militiaman that thought we were thieves carrying somebody else's belongings. We had to spend some time at the militia office. They let us go after they clarified the situation, and when we returned home there were guests waiting for us to celebrate oure wedding. That's how our family life began.

Isaac got a job at the Institute of Physical Chemistry at the Academy of Sciences. It was so difficult for me. I finally got a job as senior lab assistant at the Department of Organic Chemistry at the Silicate Institute. I didn't like it. I managed to get the position of junior scientific employee at the Institute of Non-Organic Chemistry. After a few weeks the director of the institute called me and said that it was a mistake to employ me as junior scientific employee and that if I wanted to stay with them I had to accept the position of senior lab assistant. This was at the onset of anti-Semitic campaigns that became a state policy in 1948-49. [This was the so-called campaign against cosmopolitans.] 19

While working as senior lab assistant I prepared my thesis. But this took place at the height of anti-Semitism in 1952. My tutor Efim Grinein, a Jew, was fired. Nobody wished to even accept my thesis for review. I prepared another thesis under the leadership of Professor Fialko and defended it in 1956. I became candidate of sciences, but I had to work as senior lab assistant for ten years. I had many publications and students who were working on their thesis. But whenever I addressed the director of the institute, asking him when I would be promoted to the position of junior scientific employee he got embarrassed telling me that the time would come.

In 1966 I finally became a junior scientific employee then a senior scientific employee and, finally, a leading scientific employee. I prepared five candidates of sciences and worked on the development of new medications, based on compounds of metals with nucleic acids. I retired in 1997 when I turned 77. I broke my hip and became an invalid. My former students call and visit me. They come to see me or ask my advice.

I have been happy in my personal life. Isaac and I have two children: our daughter Irina, born in 1948, and our son Alexandr, born in 1953. My parents were helping me raise the children. My father wanted to go to work after the war, but we didn't allow him to. My parents lived with my brother and his family. My mother died in 1967, my father in 1970.

My brother Froim was married, but he didn't have children. After the war he graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic Institute. He was a talented engineer. He worked at the Kiev Relay and Automation Plant for many years. He died in 1999. My sister Inna lived in my brother's family after our parents died. I supported her buying her clothes and necessary medications. Inna was a very

kind person like all people with Down syndrome. She died in 1991.

Our children, Irina and Alexandr, followed into our footsteps. They wanted to become chemists. It was next to impossible for Jews to enter higher educational institutions at that time in Kiev and they went to study in Moscow. Irina graduated from the Faculty of Chemistry at Moscow University. She married her fellow student Yuri Malitin. Irina and Yuri live and work in Kiev. They have two children: Andrei, who graduated from the Faculty of Biology at Kiev University, and Alexandra, who studies in the 10th grade of the lyceum at the Kiev Polytechnic Institute.

Alexandr entered the Technical-Physical Institute in Moscow. He became a specialist in molecular genetics and defended his thesis. During perestroika in Ukraine in the 1990s, when financing of scientific research in Ukraine was reduced dramatically, Alexandr went to work in America. Now he works on the development of new medications and manages a big scientific department. I am proud that he is my successor: I also dedicated my work to the development of medications that people need so much. Alexandr worked in New York, Chicago and Washington, and lives in Seattle now. Alexandr's wife is an architect, and his daughter, Masha, studies in art school. She has had personal exhibitions and dreams of becoming a designer.

My husband and I have visited our son in America. Of course, we miss him, but we don't want to leave the country in which we have lived all our life. I have never been religious and never identified myself as a Jew. My husband, I and our children have always been Soviet people, patriots of our country. We always liked to celebrate Soviet holidays. We've had friends of various nationalities. We liked to get together and sing beautiful Soviet songs. We've read a lot and attended theatres, art exhibitions and concerts.

Unfortunately, I've never been to Israel, but I've read a lot and watched TV programs about this wonderful country that suffered a lot in the past. I follow up all news and events in Israel. The situation is terrible considering all the deaths of innocent people and children. I do hope that the situation will improve and people will live in peace in Israel. I wish them happiness.

There is a number of Jewish organizations in Ukraine. There are Jewish newspapers and all this has become interesting to me. Unfortunately, we cannot attend lectures or concerts due to our health condition. We read Jewish newspapers and watch the Yahad program 20 on TV. Hesed provides assistance to us. We find it wonderful that Jewish life has revived in Ukraine.

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 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.

3 Babi Yar

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

4 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.

5 Whites (White Army)

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

6 Reds

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

7 Greens

members of the gang headed by Ataman Zeleniy (his nickname means 'green' in Russian).

8 Podol

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

9 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

10 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

11 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.

12 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.

13 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.

14 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.

15 Professor Mamlock

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf - a friend of Bertolt Brecht - from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

16 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non- aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

17 Blockade of Leningrad

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

18 Item 5

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War WII until the late 1980s.

19 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 antisemitic 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'.

20 Yahad program

Weekly program of Jewish content on Ukrainian national television.