Haya-Lea Detinko

Haya-Lea Detinko
Country: Russia
City: Saint Petersburg
Interviewer: Bella Shevchuk

[Haya-Lea Nakhmanovna is a cultured hospitable woman of 82 years old. She perfectly remembers many details of her hard life and the life of her ancestors. She is proud of her relatives. In spite of her 15 years ordeal in a political camp, she retained the best qualities of her soul and wants to pass to the future generations an example of greatness of spirit of her relatives and friends. Haya Nakhmanovna says, that it is her duty to relate to the researchers the stories of Jewish lives paying tribute to spiritual power and wealth of her ancestors.]

My maternal grandparents came from the Rovno district in Poland. In 1939 the Russians took control of that part of Poland and it became the Western Ukraine. Pinkhas Leib, my mother's father, was born in 1827. I do not know his surname, which means I do not know my mother's maiden name.

Grandfather was tall and handsome and wore a large beard with payes [sidelocks]. He was very religious, always wore a skullcap, and regularly attended synagogue. My grandparents spoke Yiddish with each other and my mother spoke Yiddish as well. My grandparents lived a long time; my grandfather was around 100 years of age when he died. I cannot remember the name of my grandmother on my mother's side but I can visualize her and remember that I called her 'Grandma.'

She and my grandfather dressed up very beautifully to go to the synagogue. My grandmother wore a wig at all times in accordance with traditional customs and over that she wore a black open-work transparent scarf. They celebrated all Jewish holidays. At the beginning of Sabbath they always lit candles and at the end of Sabbath they celebrated the moite-Shabos [End of Sabbath in Yiddish] or havdalah [in Hebrew]. They were very kind and liked to help people, especially the poor who came to our house for a handout.

On the Sabbath, Grandma and Grandpa welcomed these poor people as well as all children and friends who came to visit into the house and fed them cholent. Since cooking was prohibited on the Sabbath, Grandma prepared the food and left it in the Russian stove on Friday evening, so that when she took it out on the Sabbath, the meal was still hot. Choelnt is a very tasty Jewish meal: special potatoes stewed with meat and which was claret in colour. We had all other dishes too, including challah.

My mother, Pesya-Mindlya Pinkhas-Leibovna Kats, was born in 1897 in the Rovno district. She received no education and was illiterate. She was a housewife and a mother and raised four children: Hava [1916-1960], Aron-Moisha [1919], Haya-Lea (myself) [1920], and Bella [1925-1941].

She was very religious and imparted all the Jewish traditions to us. My mother was executed in Rovno in 1941 at the age of 44. My mother had two sisters, Malka and Khana, also housewives who married and had children. All of them perished in the Rovno ghetto in 1941.

I never knew my grandparents on my father’s side as they died long before I was born. I remember my father telling me that his sister, Miriam Chernizer, had the same name as my mother, Miriam Kats, but I can’t remember anything else about her.

Miriam was shot in Rovno in 1941. My father also had a brother named Shaya, who was a teacher in Rovno until 1941. He lived in the Jewish quarter in Rovno near the synagogue in Shkolnaya Street. Shaya had many children and his family was quite poor.

father often helped them out. Shaya and his family were all murdered by the Germans. My father, Nakhman Abramovich Kats, was born in 1895 in Orokhov, which was then in Poland near Lvov. I was only in Orokhov once, when I was four years old, and I cannot remember anything about it.

As a child my father received a Jewish education in a cheder and in 1909 he finished his education in a yeshiva in Orokhov. My father was ordained a rabbi [smikhot] but he thought that he wouldn’t be able to support his family that way, so he became a stockbroker instead. However, he was a member of the managing board of the synagogue in Stoloner.

My father did not want to be drafted into the army so he chopped off two toes on his foot on purpose and was exempted. My father was executed in Rovno in 1941 at the age of 46.

I, Haya-Lea Nakhmanovna Kats (Detinko), was born in 1920 in Rovno. My mother told me that my younger brother, Aron, used to shake his head up and down meaning "yes, yes," and I always shook mine from left to right meaning "no, no."

Our living conditions were terrible. We lived in the damp cellar of my Uncle Braker, who was my mother’s cousin and quite wealthy. A cooper lived in the courtyard, who fixed barrels with metal hoops, and we had to endure the knock and rattle of his work from morning until night.

We children were all born in the maternity house in Rovno. In 1925 my mother gave birth to my sister, Bella. Bella spoke only Yiddish and studied in a Jewish school until she was 15 years old. In 1927 my mother had another son but my parents were never able to bring him home as he died from burns when the maternity house burned down.

My grandfather, Pinkhas Leib, had already arrived to prepare for the circumcision of my new brother. My entire family was very upset by my little brother’s death. They cooked peas and other dishes. It is terrible to recollect now that a man in black arrived at our home carrying a black parcel under his arm. The grief was heart-breaking and I have never forgotten it.

We celebrated all of the Jewish holidays in our home. On Passover [Pesach] we reclined in armchairs (a custom that was called mesubin) and read the haggadah. We filled four glasses with wine and opened the door for Ilya (Isaiah the prophet) to enter and drink. Once when I was sent to

open the door there was a beggar standing behind it. I was very frightened, ran and hid under the table. My father welcomed the beggar into our house where he ate at our table.

There was a large beautiful synagogue in the city center of Rovno near our home and it was the center of Jewish activities. Many of our cousins studied in the yeshiva in our city and they came to visit us on weekdays and on the Sabbath.

My entire family attended the synagogue including my mother and myself.

On Yom Kippur we observed the fast and I still do it now, despite my terrible illnesses, just as I did in the camps.

On Rosh Ha-Shanah we thrilled to the sound of the shofar. Because the first thing we would do after the day of fasting was to drink a glass of tea with milk, I would put up the samovar and wait for my parents to come back from the synagogue.

My mother went to the market, which in Rovno was very extensive, to buy food. She always returned in a state of exhaustion and used to tell us, “Let me sleep for five minutes or I won’t be able to do anything." I sometimes went with her. We tried to buy only kosher products and took the chickens we bought at the market to a shochet [kosher butcher] where he slaughtered them.

We had no maid and I helped my mother around the house, especially when she baked. My brother, Aron, also helped my mother with the housework. I washed the floors and Aron polished the wooden surfaces to a high gloss. My older sister, Hava, had already finished grammar school and had married and my youngest sister, Bella, was too small to help with the housework.

In 1925, when I had grown slightly older, I was sent to cheder for one year with Aron where I was taught to read and write—not by rabbis but by other learned men with beards.

There I mastered writing in Hebrew. In 1926, I entered a grammar school called Tarbut which was quite far from our home and where my older sister, Hava, had also studied. The overall period of study was 11 years: the first three years were preparatory and the following eight were grammar school proper. I started at the Tarbut when I was six years old but probably because my knowledge was insufficient for the first class, I repeated it again for a second year.

Half of lessons were conducted in the Polish and the other half in Hebrew. Foreign languages were taught from the fourth year, including German and Latin. Each subject was taught by a different teacher. Generally I was a good student but when my brother started to fall behind he began to study with me in the same class. We had to wear a school uniform that was made for us by a dressmaker who was a friend of my mother. I loved to go with my mother to try on my beautiful new dresses, and it was during that time when I developed a liking for sewing.

The older pupils in the school enticed the younger students to join various youth organizations. I joined Ha-Shomer Hazair [Young Watchman]. We were called b’nai mitbar [Children of the Desert] and wore square kerchiefs with a band on our heads. At school we embroidered special stars on our berets with glossy threads. Aron chose to join Betar. He liked the full-dress uniform, in which he looked like a warrior. We wore our uniforms and kerchiefs proudly. My brother’s uniform included a whistle around his neck.

My family generally lived well, but I sometimes lacked money to pay the dues [keren kayemet] to belong to Ha-Shomer Hazair. In those circumstances, I offered my services as a tutor to Jewish families with younger school children since I was already a senior. For each lesson, I received about five zloty, which was quite a small sum, but I was proud that I had earned it myself and I didn't have to borrow from parents.

We also collected money for Israel from other Jewish people. Everyone was assigned a district. In my district, people were generous and as a result they were listed in special registers. By 1936 I had reached the sixth form. However, in that year I was forced to quit school because a teacher named Khvoinik began to harass me.

Once, after the entire class had taken an algebra test and everyone had received their results back except me, I rose and asked him for my grades. He asked me, "Is Hava Kats your sister?" When I answered that she was, he gave me back my work on which he had written, "I am not sure you did this work independently." I burst into tears and told him, "Don't mix my sister in this business."

On that occasion I was ordered to leave the classroom and thereafter he began to accuse me unfairly of any number of things. So I asked father to hire a tutor for me so I could thoroughly prepare for classes. But then Khvoinik ceased to ask me anything at all. As a result I quit school when I was 16 years old, a decision I do not regret.

In 1932, my older sister, Hava, joined a kibbutz in Poland and lived there for one year. There she met Yakov Blikh, who became her boyfriend, and who helped her to emigrate from Poland to Israel where she intended to study medicine by providing the certificates for her departure and some money. Yakov and Hava were eventually married. My parents sent her off to Israel with a plush blanket and a beautiful coat. I have a photo of her from that time.

She was very beautiful and all of the available men in Rovno were in love with her, including Khvoinik, the teacher who persecuted me.

Yakov and Hava had two children, both sons. Hava died in 1960 at the age of 44 for reasons I do not know although she did have high blood pressure. When I was in Israel, I visited my sister's grave. Hava became a nurse and she was very respected—even loved—at the hospital where she worked. Although I did not know it for a long time, she died at work.

One of Hava's sons died young but her other son, Avraam Blikh, still lives in Israel. In 1988, when Natan, the elder son of my brother, Aron, came to visit me from Germany (he now lives in Israel too), he concealed from me that Hava was dead.

After I quit grammar school at age 16 I decided to attend ORT, which offered vocational education for seamstresses. There I studied "easy confection" for which the instructor was a Mrs. Galina. I made good progress and enjoyed it very much. The premises were very clean—there was never a single thread on the floor. I try to follow that example in my life and maintain strict order in my apartment even now.

After graduation I began to sew brassieres, corsets, and the like. It was a pleasant job and my love of sewing which had been imparted to me by my mother stood me in good stead.

In Rovno we lived poorly at first, but then my father's stock broking business began to be successful. He was able to buy a series of houses for his family. Eventually we lived in a big house with twelve rooms not including the kitchens.

We lived on the second floor in a three-room apartment and leased the other floors out as apartments for additional income. We lived in that house until 1941. Then the Russians forced us to reduce our living space, leaving us with only one room. We were able to keep that one room because my mother cried so much, otherwise they would have thrown us out of the house entirely.

The room had no exit to the street or to the staircase so our neighbours, who had lived beside us for many years, kindly conceded to us a small adjacent room, next to our former apartment. We used this room to go in and out even though it led through their bedroom.

In 1939, when the Russians came to Rovno, my father found a job as a warehouse manager at a wood processing plant. He was dismissed from that job one year later, when they declared him to be a member of the hated "bourgeoisie" because he owned a house.

After that my father was unemployed until he was executed by the Germans after they re-occupied Rovno in 1941. In 1938 I decided to follow in the steps of my older sister, Hava, and join a kibbutz in Slonim, Poland in the Baranovitsky district. I was hoping to immigate to Israel as Hava had done.

In the kibbutz people learned different jobs to prepare them for life in Israel. On September 17, 1939 Russia occupied the Baranovitsky district and the city of Rovno and I returned home. My friends and I walked on foot through the woods until we reached the railway, and then we took a train to Rovno. Everyone was very glad to see me back.

From 1939 to 1941, while the Russians occupied Rovno, courses to learn bookkeeping were offered by the NKVD. Starting in late 1939, I studied to be a bookkeeper and until June 1941 I worked as an bookkeeper for the NKVD.

The Poles, under the instruction of the Russians, were put to work building the Peremyshl-Kiev highway. My accounting unit moved forward with them and eventually we reached the town of Peremyshl in 1940.

These were disturbing times—war was in the air. After I fulfilled one year of the contract, I asked the Russians to allow me to return home. The personnel manager tried to persuade me to stay with promises of promotions and salary increases, but when I began to cry he let me return home to Rovno.

My family was poor again, my father had lost his job at the wood processing plant, and everything looked bad. At last, in January, 1941, I found a job as a bookkeeper in a state printing house. I worked very hard and was warmly accepted by the collective. They respected me and elected me to public posts. It seemed that I had found my place in this new community.

Then without warning at three o'clock in the morning of June 5, 1941, several Russians came to arrest me. They showed the warrant and started to conduct a search. My mother understood at once what was going on and fainted. I didn't know what to do. Bella was dispatched to the nearest drugstore at three o'clock in the morning for some first aid. I had to use all my force to open my

mother's mouth and called for some water. When she recovered consciousness, she exclaimed: "What did you save me for? They're taking you away, I don't want to live!"

I never saw my father, mother, or my little sister, Bella, again.

We went on foot through the entire town to the prison. When I asked, "Why have I been arrested?" they would only tell me, "You'll find out!" They conveyed me directly into a big room, where there were already many prisoners. I recognised one of them as a friend, and I learnt that they had arrested seven people that night.

Later they charged us with being in Ha-Shomer Hazair, which they considered to be an anti-Soviet anti-Zionist organization. During the first few days I was imprisoned I received parcels from my parents, including some me warm clothes.

I was surprised and wondered, "Why? Am I exiled to Siberia? What do I need those warm clothes for?" I kept all these things. When I was summoned for interrogations, I was terribly nervous. I had a boyfriend by the name of Azriel Vevrik, an only son, who lived in the small town of Berestechko. He was tall, handsome, and had blue eyes. He was also a bookkeeper and frequently came to see me in Rovno. My father wanted us to get engaged but the times were restless, and we decided to take our time. So, when they summoned me to interrogations—it always happened when we were washing ourselves in the bathhouse for some reason—I thought that he had been arrested too and imagined that I heard his voice.

Seventeen days after my arrest, on June 22 at 4 a.m. one hour before reveille, there was a terrible siren. Everyone in the cell, where we slept on the floor, instantly understood that the most terrible thing had happened: the war had begun.

On June 25, 1941, they started to evacuate us from Rovno farther to the east into the territory of the Soviet Union. We were taken to the railway station by trucks covered with canvas and put into box cars used for transportation of cattle. I could see nothing. As the train passed by my house, those who saw it and who knew me, shouted, "We are passing Haya's house now!" I couldn't stick my head out and look because the guards were pushing me with their guns.

The railway was permanently bombed from the planes, but we survived. The free Ukrainians who were with us on the train in other cars, jumped down out of the train to take shelter when the air-raid warning sounded, but we could not because we were being guarded. The Ukrainians showed by gestures to the low-flying German pilots that there were prisoners on the train so perhaps that is how we survived the bombing.

After the alarm was over, the Ukrainians came to each car and asked if anyone was wounded. In this way we reached the city of Kamyshin in the Stalingrad region where we were placed in another prison. In that prison there were only women and two persons had to sleep on one bed.

A new investigation was started and once again I was accused of belonging to the Zionist organization Ha-Shomer Hazair. As the front came nearer we were evacuated again to the east.

This time we were put on a barge on which we floated down a river until we reached a town with labour camp settlements all around. The conditions on the barge were truly horrifying.

A cholera epidemic blazed up. People often died right where they were standing including one man who died while when we were sitting at a table eating. Many people perished. Among them was my friend, Hana, who fell ill with cholera. I wanted to take care of her but the Russians wouldn’t allow me. While still alive, she was separated from the healthy prisoners. By this time they had begun to burn the diseased people alive, including a nurse who had caught the infection by looking after the sick.

When we were finally unloaded from the barge, somebody pointed at a figure on the ground and said to me, "Look, there’s that scientist lying there. See how many worms are all around him!" At that point, the sick were separated from the healthy and we, the survivors of this process, were placed in quarantine for nine months somewhere in the Kazan region in a place I think was called Sviyaga.

I fell ill there myself with a heavy cold. I couldn’t walk, and was put in a hospital. I was put to work when I felt a little bit better. Then one day I saw my friend, Hana, dressed in trousers and a man's jacket! I had been so sure she was dead! Her clothing had been burnt because of the disease and they had given her terrible ill-fitting clothing. I took care of her, and we slept together on one bed. She was a good dressmaker and organized a shop in Sviyaga.

She had taught me many things in regard to sewing. As a result, in the camp I was able to announce that I could sew although I was still sent to perform the general work. I still have an injured finger. My friend, Hana, lives in Israel at this time.

Over the course of four years, I was in 11 different prison camps. Finally my verdict was announced: 10 years of imprisonment and five more years in exile.

All I could do was stand there and whisper to myself, "Ten years! Ten years!" A security girl gave me a photo of herself and said, "Here, Kats, take it to remember!" I have that photo to this day.

After the verdict I was sent to a camp called East Ural Lag in the city of Tavda, which was a mixed camp for both men and women. In the beginning the camp authorities sent me to do general work, but in a couple of days when they learned that I could sew, they charged me with tailoring. In East Ural Lag I was liberated on May 9, 1945.

The commandant collected all of us together and announced the victory. But for us nothing changed.

In 1946 my brother, Aron, came to see me. He had survived and had been searching for me everywhere. When he found me he somehow managed to get the permission to visit me.

Because I knew beforehand that he was coming, I was able to prepare a whole notebook for him written in Hebrew. I wrote everything that had happened to me and entitled it "Only I Didn’t Die." When I handed him the notebook, Aron asked me, “What should I do, wait for you or leave for Poland?"

At that time Poles were being repatriated to Poland and I advised him to leave without thinking twice. He was already married and had a child. From Poland, Aron and his family moved to Germany, where he became the director of a Jewish grammar school. He worked there until he had

an opportunity to leave for Israel. In their first five years in Israel they lived in misery, but he was able to continue his education and became a teacher of mathematics.

He worked as a math teacher until his retirement. Now he lives in Holon, near Tel Aviv, and I correspond with him. His son, Natan, lives in a kibbutz. When Aron told me about the death of my parents and my little sister Bella, I fell seriously ill. All three died in the ghetto in Rovno.

Aron himself survived only by a miracle. Because of my nervous condition I suffered from nettle-rash and spent more than a year in a hospital after which I resumed my work in the sewing workshop. During this time I was treated well by everybody. The free workers advised me to master the profession to the degree where I could be able not only to sew, but also to cut.

In 1951, when only three months remained before I would be discharged, I was sent to a strict regime camp in Mordovia, because there was an order by Stalin to put all the "political" prisoners in strict regime camps . After we reached Krasnoyarsk, we sailed on a barge up the Yenisey River to the settlement of Maklakovo [today it is the town of Lesosibirsk]. It was a big settlement with an extensive forestry industry.

There I established a workshop producing light dresses and became known around the settlement. My life in the exile began. I had no shortage of work, workers, or money. I rented a room, bought a sewing machine, and started to live a normal life.

There was a Jewish family from Vilnius in the Maklakovo settlement. Like myself, the man had been exiled and his wife had chosen to join him. Their last name was ‘Kats,’ and my first name was ‘Kats.’ But they were Lithuanians, and thus their last name had the ending "-as", so they were actually ‘Katsas.’ Their attitude to me was very warm and they always invited me to their home for holidays. We became fast friends.

One Passover [Pesach] they got hold of matzah from somewhere and invited me and another man called Shaya Itskovich Detinko, to the seder. We both could sew and when he asked if I had a sewing machine I said, “Yes, I have.” He then asked me, “Can I come and sew myself a cap?” This is how our friendship began.

Like me, Shaya had been born in Poland in 1903, so he was 17 years older than me. I do not know anything about his parents except that his father’s name was Itsik. His entire family was dead.

Shaya was a very educated man and before the war he had worked as the rector of the Higher Communist Political University in Leningrad. He was very respected and all his friends loved him very much. His wife was arrested in Leningrad as a Polish spy, and soon after, in 1933, he too was arrested as an accomplice. Shaya was sentenced to death, but the death penalty was commuted to 10 years of imprisonment. His daughter, Bella, survived and was brought up in a boarding school.

She now lives in Kemerovo. Later, when Shaya was in a prison camp in Sverdlovsk, they gave him five more years. He was an ardent, well-known, and respected communist. In total, he was convicted to 15 years.

During his imprisonment, Shaya had lost all his hair. I liked him bald all the same. He was a good man and a good friend and he later became my husband. At first we lived in my rented room, but

after awhile we began to build our own house.

Shaya was rehabilitated by then. I was invited to teach secondary school children about cutting and sewing and I closed the shop. In 1956, while we were in exile we celebrated the Jewish holidays with the Gendler family. We baked matzo, made stuffed fish, tsimmes (carrots with prunes), and galushka (chicken fat with eggs).

On Shavuot we cooked pancakes with cottage cheese. On Purim we made Hamantaschen, which were triangles with poppy-seeds.

We did not announce our meetings and our neighbours did not know about our celebration of Jewish holidays.

In 1957 I received a "clean" passport without any restrictions. Now I could go wherever I wanted and live anywhere.

I decided to return to Rovno although Shaya could not go with me at that time. In Rovno, I found some people who had escaped the catastrophe, and finally I learned of the fate of my family.

My parents and my sister, Bella, had been executed with the other residents of the ghetto. They were shot near Rovno in a forest called Sosyonki. I was given shelter and I stayed for a few days. I recovered my pre-war labour experience records and returned to Maklakovo in mourning for my parents and sister.

Now I had only my sister, Hava, in Israel and my younger brother, Aron, in Poland. I began to correspond with acquaintances that still lived in Rovno.

A small Jewish community had re-established itself there. Several years later, in 1960, they put a memorial in the forest at the place of the mass execution. The names of my parents and sister are cut in the stone there. I was invited to the dedication of the memorial in Sosyonki and I still have photographs of the event. I had survived because I was serving my prison term in Stalin’s camps.

In 1958 I became pregnant with my first child. Shaya wanted to return to Leningrad, but we agreed not to go until I give birth because I was 38 years old and my blood pressure was too high. I wanted a baby very badly. Shaya said, "There are a lot of patients like you in Leningrad, you won’t receive half the attention that you will have here in Maklakovo." It was a difficult birth and in the end I had to have a caesarean section.

My son, Victor Shaevich, was born in Maklakovo in 1958. We moved to Leningrad when he was one year old.

Actually, we celebrated his birthday in Maklakovo and then left for Leningrad. At first we received a room in a communal apartment and then, when Shaya fell ill, we were given a separate one-room apartment. Victor went to school near our home at 20 Nauki Street. The school itself was at 23 Nauki Street. He finished school with good marks.

In Leningrad I became a dressmaker and worked in a studio at 21 Nauki Street until I retired.

Initially, I was very worried about how my life would be in a large city like Leningrad. But everything turned out fine. Shaya's friends accepted me, and were even indignant at him that he had left his wife and one-year-old baby at the Moscow railway station in Leningrad while he unsuccessfully searched for a hotel for us. His old friend, Elizaveta Ivanovna, was very angry at him when he arrived and told her that he had left his family at the station and she ordered him immediately to go and fetch us. Shaya returned early in the morning and took us to her home where we stayed until we got the room in Leningrad we had been promised before we left Maklakovo.

In 1961 I too was rehabilitated. My husband again plunged into party work and became the rector of the Public University in Leningrad. I worked at home and raised our son. We sold our house in Maklakovo and purchased furniture.

Everything was good until Shaya fell ill in 1965 from throat cancer. When he began complaining of pain, we started to visit doctors, but for a long time he was treated improperly. He spent a whole year in the hospital. He communicated with me in writing because he could not speak.

Shaya died in 1968. Victor was 10 years old.

The death of my husband upset me terribly. Once, on Nevsky Avenue, I fainted and got a concussion in the fall. I was in critical condition in the hospital for a full month, but I recovered. The teacher, who picked up my son, brought him to her house, and took care of him for the entire month is now my best friend. Victor finished school and we moved to another apartment that had two rooms.

After finishing school Victor wanted to learn to fly a plane. However, he had a little scar on his leg that he got in a pioneer camp when he jumped into the water, stepped on a bottle, and cut his leg. The flight school asked for a certificate from the hospital. Victor brought it to them but was still rejected. Victor was a sportsman, a tobogganist, and he said, "If I go to Lezgaft Institute what shall I do after graduation? I can be a teacher of physical culture. But what will that do for me?"

So he applied to enter the Bonch-Bruevich Institute of Communications, although it was going to be difficult because he was a Jew. He came to me in the studio and told me about all the obstacles he faced. I cried a lot because I knew that the only reason for his suffering was the fact that he was born a Jew.

But he was finally accepted and finished well. Immediately after graduation he got a job in Lentelefonstroy [Leningrad Association of Telephone Providers]. To this day he works there as a chief engineer and has a good reputation. During this period, I received letters from Israel from my brother, Aron, through the Katsas family in Vilnius. When the political thaw of 1965 occurred, Natan, Aron's son, came to visit us.

Regarding antisemitism in the Soviet years, I experienced a few incidents. Once, when I was standing in a line in a shop a woman shouted at me: "You should go to Israel!" The second incident was near my home. As I approached a booth to buy something the saleswoman called me a 'dirty Jude' for no reason. Had there been a policeman nearby, I would have asked for help. These were the only two cases I remember, when I was offended on the grounds of my Jewish heritage [if you don't count Stalin's camps].

At the Institute, Victor met and married Tanechka. They have two daughters: Irochka, who is graduating from the Institute of Economics and Engineering in 2002, and Katya, who is currently finishing school and who insists repeatedly, "I will only go the college where my parents studied!" Thus, she is preparing to enter the Institute of Communications.

My son and his family live well, and they have a summer residence. They don’t let me stay alone, regularly visit and support me in every possible way.

In 1995 Victor went to Israel for ten days to visit friends who had immigrated from Russia. Victor and his family had, for a time, also wanted to leave but then they changed their minds. Even I wanted to immigrate to Israel. I went to Sokhnut, but they refused to let me go on the grounds that without my son I wouldn’t be happy there. Aron told me the same thing. Although I can receive a double pension [asirat tsion] there as a former prisoner, it appears that I am not fated to live in Israel.

In 1989 I went to visit Aron in Israel. He has a very comfortable four-room apartment with two bathrooms and all the conveniences. I stayed with him for 3 months and we visited many of his friends who had themselves survived the Holocaust and spent a lot of time recollecting our youth. I, as an honored guest from the Soviet Union, was asked to light the candles.

I put on a kerchief and performed the ceremony, and everything went on very solemnly and pleasantly.

I celebrate all Jewish holidays at home. I still speak Hebrew and hold holiday celebrations in my apartment which are attended by about 12 persons. Hesed Avraham is also very supportive.

I visit the daytime centre where I am respected. They call me often and send their regards, and visit me in the hospital as well. I don’t have enough words to express my gratitude to all these people.