

Leonid Aptekar

Leonid Aptekar

Kiev

Ukraine

Date of interview: July 2004

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

I interviewed Leonid Aptekar at the Jewish Cultural Society facility where the Kiev organization of Jewish veterans has its meetings. Leonid is a short and stout man growing bald. He is full of energy and quick in his movements and manner of speaking. He is a very open and friendly person. He is always busy despite his age. In 1992 he received a plot of land and spends a lot of time in his garden. He's planted few cherry trees in the memory of his mother and his Skvira hometown. Leonid reads a lot and enjoys discussing what he has read. He takes an interest in the Jewish life in Kiev, actively participates in Hesed and the Kiev organization of Jewish veterans related activities.



My maternal grandfather Lazar Brodskiy and grandmother Denia (nee Volodarskaya) were born in Volodarka town, Belaya Tserkov district Kiev province [37 km from Belaya Tserkov, 115 km from Kiev]. I don't know my grandparents' dates of birth.

The Belaya Tserkov district was located within the [Jewish] Pale of Settlement [1](#) existing during the czarist regime. The Jewish population constituted a bigger part of the population. [about 40% of the population]. Most settlements, including Volodarka, were Jewish towns. The Jewish population was religious. Jews observed Jewish traditions, went to the synagogue, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home and followed kashrut. There were atheists of Jews in bigger town, but this was not to happen in little towns. Of course, there was a synagogue, cheder, a general education Jewish school in the town. There was a Jewish cemetery in the suburb of Volodarka.

There were five children in my mother's family. My grandmother may have had more children, but those five survived. My mother Heisura, the oldest of the children, was born in 1895, and my mother's brother Gersh, born in 1910, was the youngest. Between them came mama's brother Teviye and sisters Boba and Udl. My grandfather Lazar died in 1918, before I was born. He was buried according to Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery.

My mother's parents were religious. On Sabbah and holidays my grandmother and grandfather went to the synagogue with their children. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home. I don't know how my grandmother and grandfather celebrated these holidays: my grandfather had died before I was born and my grandmother lived with us, when I remember her. They spoke Yiddish at home, but they also spoke fluent Russian with their non-Jewish neighbors.

My grandmother had to support her family and took over any job to earn their living. She baked bread for sale at home and did cooking and baking for other families in her clients' homes where she worked, but the family was big and it was difficult to provide for all of them. Mama became an apprentice of a dressmaker. When she learned this vocation she began to take orders herself. It was still hard to find clients in Volodarka: many of its residents were poor. In 1916 Jewish pogroms [2](#) overwhelmed Volodarka. Bandits broke into the town robbing and killing Jews and burning the Jewish houses. My grandmother decided to move to Skvira [40 km from Belaya Tserkov, 105 km from Kiev].

My mother and grandmother told me about the town and I also remember it very well. It was a small town with the population of about 12 thousand people. Jews constituted over a half of the population. There were three synagogues in Skvira. The biggest one was the 2-storied choral synagogue. The two other synagogues were smaller. After the revolution of 1917 [3](#) the Soviet regime started its struggle against religion [4](#) and the synagogues were gradually closing. The biggest synagogue operated till the early 1940s. Later it was also closed and housed a knitwear factory.

There were no pogroms that had overwhelmed Ukraine during the revolution and the Civil War [5](#) in Skvira where Jewish self-defense units [6](#) were formed. Their leader was local Jew Meyer Treletskiy. He was a fearless and smart man. People feared and liked him. He did not look heroic whatsoever: he was short and fat. It was thanks to his efforts that the situation in Skvira was calm and quiet through this period. The flocks and Denikin [7](#) troops preferred to pass by the town.

There were 2-storied stone houses in the central part of the town. They housed administrative offices or belonged to wealthier people. The others were clay-walled huts. The clay was a mixture of clay, chopped straw and horse manure [air-brick]. Our house where we lived before the Great Patriotic War [8](#) was one of them. My mother's brother Teviye, a tinsmith, installed the tin sheet roof on our house. There were 3 rooms, a fore room and a big kitchen with a Russian stove [9](#) in the house. There was a store shed and a living stock shed in the yard. My grandmother kept ducks, geese and goats. There was a meadow and a river near our house. There was a water mill with a mill-pond on the river where our ducks and geese swam. There was an orchard and a vegetable garden by the house. My grandmother was the head of the family. The children obeyed her strictly. None of us ever argued with her or doubted what she said. Jews lived in Jewish neighborhoods and if one of them decided to sell his house he started looking for Jewish clients and would have never sold the house to Ukrainian buyers: they wanted to have Jewish neighbors.

My grandmother told me that during the period of NEP [8](#) Jews owned all stores in the town. The shops were full and people had a good life. When the NEP was over the state took over all commercial activities, but the former Jewish store owners kept their jobs and shop assistants. Before the revolution Jews also owned shops and factories, but the Soviet regime nationalized their property. A number of wealthier Jews moved to America after the NEP was over. They understood it was not safe for them to stay since the NKVD [9](#) expropriated their property at best and at worst they might be executed. These immigrants purchased land near New York and founded the town of New Scriba: it forms a part of New York state now. During perestroika [10](#) their descendants visited Skvira to take a look at the place where their ancestors had lived.

There was a market in the center of Skvira. Ukrainian farmers were selling their food products on them. They knew that Jewish housewives would only want to buy the living poultry, and there was a shochet near the market, and the housewives could use his services. Farmers also sold vegetables, fruit and berries – cherries were just great!

When the soviet power was established cooperative companies started to develop in Skvira. I remember the Metallist plant from Kiev created the 'Metallist' cooperative company manufacturing metalwork. This plant also did much to accomplish improvements in the town: it asphalted the streets and installed electric power lines. There was a shoemaking company, a repair company and a tailors' company where my mother worked.

During the period of collectivization [11](#), a kolkhoz [12](#) and a Jewish kolkhoz [13](#) were established in Skvira. The chairman of the Jewish kolkhoz was the man whose family name was Zub. When the kolkhoz was established people had to give their cattle, tools and also, sewing machines for some reason to the kolkhoz. This kolkhoz was closed in 1936 for being non-profitable, all property of the Jewish kolkhoz to the neighborly non-Jewish kolkhoz and the former employees of the Jewish kolkhoz also went to work there.

The district and town authorities, director of the only plant in Skvira, executive authorities and militia were represented by Jews. There were hardly any Ukrainians among them. Jews always helped and supported each other. They spoke Yiddish at home and in the streets. They openly celebrated Jewish holidays even during the Soviet rule. All boys had brit milah rituals. The family installed tables in the yards and treated all neighbor children with sweets and cookies.

When my mother's family moved to Skvira uncle Gersh was working as a clerk in a store. He could write and count well. I don't know about my uncle Teviye, but my mother and her sisters had no education. After the revolution of 1917, when they were quite grown up, they finished a likbez [14](#) where they learned to write and read. After the revolution uncle Gersh joined Komsomol [15](#) and became a Komsomol activist.

Gersh became a butcher after the revolution and Teviye was a roof maker. Mama's sisters went to work at the Metallist shop, which manufactured beds. They were laborers.

Even after the revolution Jews commonly turned to matchmakers to prearrange weddings. Matchmakers also visited my grandmother. They arranged Boba's marriage with Idl Damskoy, a Jewish man from Pavoloch, Zhitomir region [25 km from Skvira, 105 km from Kiev]. My aunt had a real Jewish wedding with the chuppah and the rabbi. After the wedding the newly weds stayed to live in Skvira and both worked at the Metallist shop. They received an apartment in 1940, but I don't remember where they lived before. They had two children: an older son and a daughter. I don't remember their names. They were poor and grandmother supported them. Mama's sister Udl was single.

My mother's brothers also married Jewish women through matchmakers' services. Gersh's wife Lisa was born in Skvira in 1900. Gersh and Lisa had two daughters. Vera was born in 1933, and Inna was born in 1939. Teviye and his wife Hana had two daughters and a son: Sonia was born in 1927, Riva was born in 1933, and their long-awaited son was born in 1935.

During the Civil War a partisan unit was deployed in Skvira. My future father Iosif Aprekar, a Jew from Odessa [16](#) served in it. My mother liked him and they got married. They had a chuppah and klezmers at their wedding. Mama told me no details. My father stayed to live in Skvira. I was born on 25th July 1925. I was given the Russian [common] name [17](#) of Leonid. My Jewish name is Luzer after my maternal grandfather. Some time later my father left us for Odessa. He sent money for some time before he disappeared completely. We had no information about him. We were very poor and in 1934 mama decided to find him in Odessa and make him support us. However, I never met my father. We found his second family in Odessa: his wife and two daughters. They told us that my father worked in a store and peculated the money. He disappeared escaping from trial. Mama and I went back home and never tried to find him again. My grandmother and mother raised me to be a decent and honest man and I am very grateful to them for this.

They taught me to do any work about the house. I took the goats to the pasture, geese and ducks to the pond and weeded the vegetable garden. In winter the geese and ducks were kept in the attic of our house. We always had goose fat and meat. My grandmother melted the fat with onions: it was very delicious. I liked it spread on my bread. My grandmother did the cooking on the Russian stove in the kitchen: she made broth, borscht and stew. She also baked delicious pastries. Nobody else could cook as delicious as my grandmother! In summer and autumn my grandmother made stocks for winter. There were barrels with sauerkraut and pickles. My grandmother liked making jam. For some reason cherries were to be beaded on a thread and this was my chore. My grandma made cherry, apple, plum and pear jam. I enjoyed the process as well gathering foam and tasting it. My grandmother baked bread for a week and this was the most delicious bread I had ever had in my life. In 1934 the Skvira residents were forbidden to make bread at home. There was a bakery and a baker's store opened. People lined up to buy bread since this was the only baker's in the town. Komsomol activists made the rounds of houses to make sure nobody violated the order. My grandmother went to the store to buy one loaf of bread, the allowed ration. Some residents went to buy bread in Kiev. It was not allowed to take bread from out of town, but people managed to do it in secret.

My grandmother was very religious. We always celebrated Sabbath at home. On Friday morning my grandmother made a general clean up. We had ground floors and she swept it clean. My grandmother also cooked food for two days. There was always gefilte fish, sweet and sour stew, chicken broth and strudels with nuts and jam to eat. On Friday evening my grandma lit candles and prayed. Then the family sat down to dinner. On Saturday morning my grandma went to the synagogue. Later she read her prayer book and told me about the Jewish history.

Of all holidays I remember Pesach. The blacksmith living in our street closed his forge one week before Pesach and engaged in baking matzah. Women joined him to make and roll the dough. Each family needed plenty of matzah: there was no bread in the Jewish houses through 8 days of Pesach. On the eve of the holiday a general cleanup was done and all crumbs swept out. My grandmother checked how clean the house was. The Pesach crockery was taken down from the attic where it was stored during the year. My grandma followed kashrut and had all kosher crockery, but it was not appropriate for Pesach. Geese and chicken were taken to the shochet before Pesach. My grandmother made chicken broth, roasted chicken and geese, stuffed chicken necks with liver and fried onions and made gefilte fish. She made strudels with raisins and jam and honey cakes. Grandma made potato and matzah and egg puddings. There was plenty of food at

home. I am sure there was seder conducted, but I can't remember. On Pesach grandma and mama went to the synagogue. I sometimes went there with mama. Mama and I sat on the upper tier.

Many men of Skvira wore beards. Older women like my grandma wore kerchiefs, but my mother or other women of her age only wore shawls to go to the synagogue.

Mama worked and grandma took care of the housekeeping. I went to a kindergarten before going to school. There were just two groups in the kindergarten. The food was very good, I remember we were given chicken legs with noodles, nice soups, boiled cereals with butter for lunch and a glass of milk and a bun for the afternoon snack.

There were few general education schools in Skvira and two Jewish schools, the curriculum was the same, but the language of teaching was different. I went to a Jewish school at the age of 6. All subjects were taught in Yiddish, but it was no problem for me. We had Jewish teachers. I remember all teachers. Our history teacher Zaslowski was awarded an Order of Lenin [20](#) after the Great Patriotic War. It was a very high award. I became a young Octobrist [21](#) and then a pioneer [22](#) at school. I was not quite successful at school since I did not behave myself in class, I was a rather vivacious boy and it was next to impossible for me to sit still for 45 minutes. I was often naughty and did not behave at times. Many of my classmates wanted to continue education after finishing school. Many became doctors and professional military.

Most of my friends were Jewish boys, my neighbors and classmates. We did our home chores and then went tobogganing, swam in the river or went fishing. There was an abandoned orchard on the bank of the river where we picked apples and pears.

1932-33 were hard years. This was the period of terrible famine [23](#) in Ukraine. Many people were starving to death. My grandmother managed to feed us during this period and we survived. The shop where my mother was working provided free meals to its employees, this was rather miserable food: a slice of dipped bread, some poor soup with potato peels, but we appreciated even this little food that we were provided. Mama shared her lunch with me. Now I know that she gave me a bigger part of it. Mama always waited for me to come home before sitting down for a meal.

In 1933 something happened that affected our family during the war. Our Ukrainian neighbor dug a passage to our house and broke in at night thinking that women would not repulse his attack. We heard there was somebody in the house. Grandma ran to the kitchen, saw our neighbor and started beating him. She bit him hard, even his nose bled. He rushed home. We shouted to him that we would not report this to the militia, if he closed up the sap. He did it and we thought this was the end of the story, but he took his revenge on my grandma during the war reporting to the Germans that her son served in the Soviet army.

In 1936 arrests [Great Terror] [24](#) began. None of our relatives was arrested or declared an 'enemy of the people' [25](#). I don't think any Jews were arrested in Skvira at that time. They only arrested Russian and Ukrainian residents. They arrested director of a Ukrainian school and few others, but that was all. Of course, we believed those people were guilty. Nobody could even imagine that Stalin, the 'father of all peoples' was a horrible criminal. When we had concerts in the house of culture, the first was always to be a song about Lenin [26](#), or Stalin. At one time I was on the edge of becoming 'an enemy of the people'. I was in the 4th form and was a terrible naughty boy and a

fidget. There was a portrait of Stalin in our class where he was painted sitting at the table wearing his military kittel. The other boys and I were throwing paper balls into one another and my ball incidentally hit the portrait of Stalin. Of course, there was no evil intent of mine, but really what a mess it caused. Mama was invited to school, I was crying, the management wanted to expel me and I was trying to explain that it was not my fault. Fortunately, they left me alone some time afterward.

When the 1932-33 famine was over, life started to improve gradually, though the state introduced high taxes on those who kept livestock and had gardens. These taxes could be paid in money or agricultural products. I remember my grandmother saving eggs to pay the tax. We fed pigs for sale. Mama's brother Gersh slaughtered them and sold at a market in Kiev. This helped us to make ends meet. Later mama's brothers and their families moved to Kiev. Teviye worked as a tinsmith in the construction agency of the Council of Ministers. Gersh went to work at the industrial trade trust. Gersh supported our family. He often visited Skvira bringing us clothes, food products and things for home. Of course, this was all lost during the war.

In the late 1930s the situation with food grew worse again. This was caused by the need to feed the army fighting against Finland [Soviet-Finnish War] [27](#), and then the need to create state food stocks in case of a war with Germany. As for the population, it had no big concerns about the war after the Finnish campaign and particularly, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [28](#) was executed. We were convinced there would be no war and that 'who came with a sword would die from sword'. We were patriots and believed in the strength and invincibility of our army. However, this conviction was no longer strong in 1941. When people say they did not know about the war then, it's not true. About 2 weeks before the war military troops were marching via Skvira toward the border day and night. Of course, one couldn't help guessing why this was happening.

I finished the 8th form of my Jewish school in 1940. This was the last graduation before the school was closed. One could tell that the authorities intended to eliminate anything Jewish from our life.

In summer 1940 all guys of 1923-1925 years of birth were gathered in a Ukrainian school. I was to be recruited to the army 2 years from then. This was the so-called 'labor mobilization'. We were to be under the command of veteran of the Civil War Dubyrntsev, a representative of the military registry office. We were given food ration, which I gave my mother. I knew I would manage somehow, but I also understood that it would be difficult for my mother and grandmother. We walked to Donetsk region. On the way we were provided meals. We walked across villages where we stayed overnight. When we reached Stalino [620 km from Kiev], we were assigned to different sites: some went to mines and the others were sent to work at plants or in kolkhozes. I was sent to work in the Stalino kolkhoz. I worked there for about a year. When I heard that Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941 without an announcement of the war, my first thought was about my mother and grandmother. I did not know what was to happen to them. I still believed that the war would be instantaneous and victorious for us. When Germans advanced as far as Donetsk region, we were told to move out of Stalino. We were given shoes and food rations for few days. I took a train to the Caucasus. The trip was long, it took about 10 days considering that I changed trains and there were long stops. At a station in the Caucasus I bumped into my acquaintances from Skvira and joined them. We had some money to buy food products and were also provided meals at stations. Everything was organized well. However, it was not safe to stand in lines at railway stations. Local authorities had an order to send certain numbers people to the arrangement of

trenches, and militia just captured people from lines to send them to the digging of trenches. I hardly managed to escape once. Of course, this was illegal, but there was nobody to complain to...

We reached the Caspian Sea and from there we took a boat across the sea. I arrived at a settlement in Andijon region in Uzbekistan over 6000 km from home. I was short and did not look my age of 16. I was sent to a local boarding school. There were not many children at the boarding school and we had sufficient food. Some time later a children's home evacuated from Nemirov Kiev region [220 km from Kiev] arrived at the boarding school. From then on we were given less food. Later I was sent to a vocational school in Tashkent. I was assigned to a construction group. In the morning we had classes and in the afternoon we went to work at the construction site. The students were involved in the construction of an aircraft plant. I worked as a bricklayer. We had breakfast in the school canteen and had lunch at the construction site. Once a woman on a street asked me to carry her luggage. We talked on the way and later this woman supported me through my study at the school. She was a common Russian woman from Tashkent. Her name was Vera, but I did not ask her surname. Her husband and son were at the front and she sympathized with me. I was away from home and alone. Vera invited me for a meal and I could wash myself and stay overnight in her cozy home. There were numbers of homeless children in Tashkent. The local authorities arranged charity shelters for homeless children to provide food and clothes to them. They did it to involve these children in work later and then recruit them to the army.

In autumn 1941 I finished my vocational school and got an assignment to work at the construction of a metallurgical plant in Zlatoust town Chelyabinsk region. I was a foreman at the construction site. It was given the status of a military construction site since metal was to be produced for army needs. We were provided 3 meals a day and 700 grams of bread. An old foreman working at this construction site supported me. His sons were at the front and he treated me like his own son. I worked at the construction till December 1942. From there I was recruited to the army. I received a food ration for the trip to the military registry office. I had flat feet and was not fit for the army service, but it was the wartime and I believed it to be my duty to go to the front line. The medical commission confirmed that I was fit for service and I was sent to a sniper school. We lived in barracks and were trained in accurate shooting. We also studied military disciplines. We were provided sufficient food: besides the ration (three hot meals per day: macaroni and boiled cereals, bread and soup with a little piece of meat) we had white bread, frute preserve and 50 grams of sugar per day.

I studied 10 months. In November 1943 we were given military uniforms, warm underwear and winter jackets. We lined up and marched to the railway station to the music. We boarded a train. I was to go to Rechytsa [250 km from Kiev] town Gomel region in Belarus where the 48th army headquarters were located. I was assigned to the 291st regiment, 170th infantry division, Army 48, as a private. I was sent to the front line without delay. There were minor battles occurring, the so-called combat survey. Our regiment was in defense. No snipers were needed and I became a machine gunner. In 1944 an overall offensive in Belarus began. Our 170th division went first. We beat the Germans as efficiently as they beat our troops at the beginning of the war. There were marshes on our right and left and this was advantageous for us. The Air Forces also supported us. I marched as far as Warsaw with my division. I had joined Komsomol before my first battle. Our colonel used to say: 'If one is to die, one better dies a Komsomol member'. During this offensive I was wounded in my leg. Severely wounded patients were taken to rear hospitals, and the others

could take treatment in a front-line hospital. I was taken to the army hospital and when I recovered, I was assigned to a reserve regiment where I was promoted to the rank of sergeant. We also took part in combat actions. It was good for me to have been taken to the army hospital since I managed to return to my regiment afterward. I was wounded again near Warsaw on 15 February 1945. My battalion commanding officer sent me to the combat position. I came onto the road, when a bullet hit me on my arm. This was severe injury and I was taken to a rear hospital in Orekhovo-Zuyevo near Moscow by the sanitary train. There was skilled medical personnel on this train and everything arranged for taking good care of the wounded. When I was released I was assigned to the 91st infantry division belonging to the 39th army. We were urgently relocated to Königsberg [Königsberg battle] [29](#). There were severe battles in this area. The Königsberg fortress was bombed day and night, Soviet, English and American Air Forces, all of them, but in vain. There was one circumstance, of which nobody was aware. Our commanding officers had detailed maps of the area, showing the roads, paths and even wells, but nobody knew that there was a whole underground town with the military forces, tanks and mortars in the forest surrounding Königsberg. There were underground passages that Germans knew very well. In early April 1945 storm troops began to be formed reassigning a battalion or a company from each regiment. Of course, those were the strongest and bravest soldiers. Storm troops were to advance ahead of the army. On 6th April our storm troops went into attack and perished. There was a deep channel before the fortress: when our troops went in attack, the Germans filled the channel with water and our soldiers drowned. Then German tanks were released from underground passages. They attacked us and we had to retreat. Our next offensive took place on 15th April and on 16th April 1945 we moved into Königsberg. Our division took part in these battles.

Of course, there were intervals between operation on the front line. During such intervals one of 3 regiment divisions was left in defense and the two others were in its rear. We undertook military training, running, shooting and overcoming obstacles. Here was mandatory political training. We had political information in each class. Later we had to answer when Lenin or Stalin was born. There were concerts and each concert started from the 'Cantata about Stalin' [Composed by M. Inyushkin and Alexandr Alexandrov in 1937 it was to be glorifying and praising the leader.], which we sang in choir. Then one of these two regiments replaced the one in defense: in this way the regiments took turns to take some rest. Such intervals lasted one or two weeks or one month. Then we went into an offensive, and again two regiments were following the one moving ahead. If the front line was stretched out, the regiments were also arranged in one line. Even when we were in defense, our reconnaissance guys always had work to do. I served in the reconnaissance squad. During intervals between battles our mission was to identify German weapons emplacements, and mark their mortar locations on the map. We did reconnaissance and captured prisoners for interrogation. They were to describe their troops' positions. Their input and our maps indicating the enemy's weapon emplacements made preparation for an offensive. At the beginning of an offensive our batteries shot about 200 shells and mines to eliminate those emplacements. After the artillery preparation we got on our feet: 'Vpered! Za rodiny! Za Stalina' ['Forward! For Motherland! For Stalin!'] and went into offensives.

There was no anti-Semitism during the war. Nobody gave any thought to the nationality issues. We fought and lived like friends. Of course, things happen at wars. Many perished in battles, but there were incidental and absurd deaths. Once we were sitting in a dot-pillbox [the word 'dot' is an abbreviation meaning a 'long-term weapon emplacement'], it was strong and reliable with the roof

of three layers of beams, when a blank shell fell and broke one of our comrade's legs. He died on the way to the medical battalion. I also remember another accident: we were sitting in an earth hut one night. There were trenches to the left and to the right from us. Of course, we left the watch posts on the left and on the right and one 'secret' post in the neutral zone to warn us if Germans started an attack. There were wires to mines all around and one soldier stepped onto an anti-tank mine on a bet that it would bear his weight. The anti-tank mines were supposed to explode under a tank weighing over 200 kg, but to remain intact under lower weights. Anyway, he stepped on it and it blew up. Many people died from other reasons than on a battlefield or from a stray bullet...

Each regiment had NKVD and SMERSH units [Abbreviation ('Smert Shpionam' meaning death for the spies). It was the 9th division of the KGB, dedicated to Terror and Diversion. It worked within the Soviet Army, ferreting out dissident soldiers, former prisoners-of-war, or those who had been in encirclements, and summarily executing them.] representatives. I did not encounter working with them and it's hard to say what their mission was. Our army liberated Soviet prisoners-of-war from camps and then SMERSH dealt with them. If they detected no crimes against the Soviet regime they gave them uniforms and assigned to the front line forces, while bandits, policemen and German accomplices were convicted and sent to the GULAG [29](#) in Siberia.

The war with Germany was over for me after the seizure of Königsberg, but I don't mean to say that I was demobilized. Our forces were still fighting in Germany, but our unit relocated to the rear and started preparations to relocate to the Far East, to the front line with Japan [30](#). The Soviet Union had an agreement for providing military assistance to the USA. When we were still in the rear we heard the news that the war was over and Germany had capitulated. Moscow was preparing for the victory parade. I was notified that General Major Dragunskiy [Dragunskiy, David Abramovich (1910-92), Jew, Soviet commander, General Colonel (1970), twice Hero of the Soviet Union (1944, for crossing of the Wisla River; 1945, for the Berlin operation). During the Great Patriotic War he was Commander of a Guard tank division. In 1969-85 chief of the higher 'Vystrel' ('Shot') course.], the current Army Commander and a Jew, by the way, had appointed few representatives of our division, including me, to participate in the parade. My army headquarters declared that I could not take part in the parade, being a short guy. I am sure that it had to do with my Jewish identity, but they did not mention this, of course. I felt hurt: when they were sending me to where bullets and shells were flying my shortness was of no account, but it was not appropriate for the parade... So I did not go to the victory parade. We were in the rear till late May 1945, a when we relocated to Mongolia in cattle transportation trains. Our trip lasted for about a month and we were in high spirits - victory!, and life went on; we had good food, American tinned food, white bread, people were greeting us and cheering to us as liberators and winners and threw flowers to us on the train. We were accommodated in tents. In late July 1945 we were given the alarm at night and ordered to move on to the Mongolian border where we were told that the Japanese occupied Manchuria. [Editor's note: The Japanese occupied Manchuria (North-Eastern province of China, bordering with Mongolia) in 1941. The Soviet Army began to attack the Japanese occupiers from Soviet and Mongolian territory in August 1945.] At 2 o'clock in the morning we were read Stalin's order stating that we were fulfilling our agreement with the USA, and it was our duty to attack and take revenge over the Japanese. And we went into the offensive. This was the first time I witnessed a self-shooting. One guy from our regiment shot his own leg to avoid the battle. This was a disgrace for all of us. We advanced 200 km across Mongolia with no battles. There were no Japanese or Mongolians. We walked few days before we saw out tanks. We followed them to

Bolshoy Hingan and Malyi Hingan. Our rear supplies were some distance behind us and we had to follow the tanks. We were hungry and had no food or water with us. The Chinese locals sympathized with us and brought us rice and flat bread. This was a hard passage. When we reached Hingan, our armed forces had already accumulated there: the Katyusha [The 82mm BM-8 and 132mm BM-13 Katyusha rocket launchers were built and fielded by the Soviet Union in World War II. The launcher got this unofficial, but immediately recognized in the Red Army, name from the title of a Russian wartime song, Katyusha.] missile units, air forces and artillery. There was artillery preparation conducted and we went into attack. We were fighting with a Samurai [Editor's note: The Samurai caste was abolished in late 19th Century. The cavalry the Soviet Army fought with could not be made of Samurai warriors] cavalry division. We defeated them. The battle was over and we went on. We marched across some fodder plant bushes resembling our corns. Every now and then some Samurais with bunches of grenades tied to them threw themselves under our tanks. For them this kind of death was a deed of honor: they were fighting for their emperor. At the time of peace a Samurai is allowed to live peaceful life: have a family, women, eat and drink to his heart's content, but during the war a Samurai had to fight and die for his emperor, or the disgrace would fall on his kin and affect many generations. They threw themselves under our tanks to die honorably. These were hard battles. Our forces were exhausted by the long war. There were boys and old men in our army while the Japanese were selected warriors, well-armed and strong. Our selected armed forces perished at the beginning of the war in 1941. We didn't have such equipment as Germans and many people had to go to attacks unarmed. There were 700 recruits from Skvira, my hometown, but only 200 of them returned home. They survived thought they became invalids, but they lived. They told us how they went into attacks having nothing but one rifle of the World War I type, the three-linear one, for three of them. I don't know what the result of this war might have been for us, had America not dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I think this was the right decision considering the situation at the front line. This decided on the outcome of the war, which might have been negative for us otherwise. All newspapers wrote about it at that time. Everybody rejoiced about this turning point in the course of the war.

The Japanese surrendered. Their squads, companies and battalions were not disbanded. All of the higher rank officers had their weapons and horses with them. The Japanese had prepared for a long war and built hospitals and barracks for their troops. We used them to accommodate the prisoners. The Japanese officers were kept separately from soldiers and sergeants. We also lodged there. The Japanese prisoners refused to eat bread. They only ate boiled rice, corn flat bread and fish. We stayed in this area for 2 years. The situation changed radically through this period. Struggle for the power began in China. America supported Chiang Kai-shek and the USSR stood for Mao Tse-Tung. Their armies fought in China. The Chan Kai-shek troops intended to land on the Kuan Tung Peninsula and our troops relocated to the seashore. To support the Mao Tse-Tung troops we gave them our 46 mm mortars. We were to delay the advance of the Chan Kai-shek troops. I was on this Peninsula until 1947. By that time the tension of situation reduced. The Chinese revolutionary army advanced to attack. In 1949 the Chan Kai-shek troops won the victory. Mao Tse-Tung and Chou En-lai were the leaders of China at the time.

In November 1944, during the war, I heard that Skvira was liberated from fascists. At that time our division was near Babruysk town in Belarus. I wrote my mother, but had no reply. Then I wrote the Sidoruk family, our Ukrainian neighbors asking them whether they knew anything about my family. They wrote me what happened. In September 1941 German troops invaded Skvira. The German

commandment appointed the time for all Jewish families to gather in the central square of Skvira. Some had evacuated and some managed to hide away, but not my family. They failed to evacuate. They were taken out of town and killed. In 1941 Riva, my mother's brother Teviye's daughter, was spending her summer vacations with my family. Riva perished along with my grandmother, mother, my mother's sisters Udl and Boba and Boba's family. These neighbors helped me to get in touch with my mother's brothers Gersh and Teviye. They also wrote their addresses to our neighbors. I wrote my uncles and since then we corresponded. Gersh was at the front and Teviye and his family evacuated with the Soviet of Ministers and its employees. Gersh was in the army since the beginning of the war. He was wounded near Kiev in August 1941. He was taken to a hospital and after the hospital he was sent to an artillery school. After finishing the school he went back to the front as an artillery battery commanding officer. He took part in battles near Konigsberg and had a number of combat awards. After the war my mother's brothers returned home. Uncle Gersh sent me parcels with apples, pork fat and garlic to the front line in the Far East.

When the term of my service on the Kwan Tung peninsula was over, another order was issued. It required guys of 1925 year of birth to serve 3 years of mandatory service. I was to serve at the Lazo station in the Primorskiy Krai. I demobilized in April 1950.

I have combat awards. In 1945, after we captured Konigsberg I was awarded a medal 'For valor' [Established in 1938, awarded for personal courage and valor in the defense of the Homeland and the execution of military duty involving a risk to life.] it's a high award; I was also awarded an order of the Great Patriotic War [31](#). I have medals 'For Konigsberg' [Established June 9, 1945. The medal was awarded to all servicemen who were directly involved in the capture of Konigsberg as well as for the officers who led the operations. Over 752 thousand medals were awarded], 'For Victory in the Great Patriotic War' [Medal 'For Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45', Established by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the glorious victory, 15 million awards]; and 'For victory over Japan' [Medal 'For victory over Japan' established on 30 September 1945 by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the victory over Japan. 1 million 818 thousand awards]. I was awarded an order 'For personal courage' [Order 'For Personal Courage', established by Presidential Decree in 1996, to honor the personal courage and heroism demonstrated under critical circumstances] by the 55th anniversary of the victory.

I headed to Skvira after my army service was over. I was eager to see my acquaintances and hear details about my dear ones. Jews had already returned from evacuation and from the army. Two residents of Skvira were Heroes of the soviet Union [32](#), one of them was Colonel Margulis, a Jew, commanding officer of an artillery brigade. He was a nice, decent and fair person. He undertook responsibility for making arrangements for the Jews who were returning from evacuation. If there were other tenants in their houses they went to see rabbi Zavele to resolve this kind of issues. They did not have to go to court. Even Ukrainians followed the rabbi's decisions. Meyer Treletskiy, another Jewish man from Skvira, started his persecution of German accomplices, when he returned from the army. He tracked down policemen of informer in villages to have them prosecuted. Many of them were executed. Our house was disassembled for wood. A woman built her own house in its place. I went to the place where my dear ones, friends, neighbors, the people, whom I had known and loved, were buried and then I went to Kiev to visit my mother's brothers Teviye and Gersh. I was going to go back to Skvira then, but my uncles insisted that I stayed in Kiev. It was very

difficult to obtain a residence permit [33](#) to stay to lie in Kiev. My uncle Teviye, who was a roof maker in the Council of Ministers, managed to obtain a permit for me to reside in his place. I wanted to rent a room, but my uncle insisted that I stayed with him. I went to work at the 'Kist' company ['hand' in Russian] as a founder. The state anti-Semitism was quite visible already, but there were still many Jews in the shop. They were readily employed as workers: the management knew they were decent and dedicated employees. Workers were not so oppressed as intelligentsia. Besides, Jews did not drink alcohol while many people drank after the war, even at their work places. So many managers preferred to employ Jews. Besides, managers were reluctant to employ those who had stayed on the occupied territory while Jews were returning from evacuation and had a more advantageous position than those Ukrainians who had stayed in Skvira during the rule of Germans.

There were good earnings and bonuses in the shop. Shops also contributed money to the restoration of Kiev. During the Khrushchev [34](#) rule our shop was converted into a small plant. A short while later I went to work at the photo goods factory where I worked 42 years. I started working with plastic and in due time I became a caster.

Soviet authorities undertook open persecution of Jews in 1948, when I was still in the army. It all started from the elimination of the Jewish anti-fascist committee [35](#), formed in April 1942. Its members were well-known actors, artists, musicians and public activists. Solomon Mikhoels [36](#), an outstanding Jewish actor, headed the committee. During the war the Jewish anti-fascist committee provided great assistance to the front. Members of the committee gathered money in America and England to buy tanks and aircraft. They were almost declared fascist accomplices, arrested, and most of them were executed. The rest of them were sent to the GULAG. Solomon Mikhoels, chairman of the committee, was murdered. It was officially announced that he was hit by a vehicle, but nobody had any doubts that this 'accident' was thoroughly planned and executed by NKVD. Then persecution of Jewish intelligentsia began. Lecturers of higher educational institutions, actors and artists were fired. Newspapers published articles denouncing another Jewish cultural or scientific activist. Then the words 'rootless cosmopolitan' were applied to Jews and trials charging 'cosmopolitans' [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [37](#) were conducted, i.e., a person was just convicted for being a Jew. Everybody, even those who were devoted to the party and Stalin, knew this. This persecution did not affect workers. In January 1953 the 'doctors' Plot' [38](#) began. Stalin's doctors were convicted of an intention to poison Stalin. Almost all of those doctors were Jews. This resulted in another wave of anti-Semitism. At first people just refused to see Jewish doctors, but then Jews were accused of many other crimes. I don't know what it might have resulted in, if Stalin had not died on 5 March 1953. There were rumors that Stalin intended to deport all Jews to Siberia. It was impossible to ignore this rumor: everybody understood how the Crimean Tatars and Chechen people had been deported [Forced deportation to Siberia] [39](#). In one night people were forced into the trains taking them to the virgin lands in Siberia and Kazakhstan. This might have happened to Jew, but God saved them. Stalin died on Purim and people were saying that God rescued Jews from extermination. However, this was later, but on the day of his death people were crying. The mourning lasted 3 days, and these days happened to be the time of common grief. Everybody thought about the same - how they were going to live without Stalin. Life seemed impossible without him: he was the symbol of the USSR for all, and for this reason he was called the 'father of all peoples'. Later, after the Twentieth Party Congress [40](#), when Khrushchev spoke about Stalin's crime, we understood what a monster he was in reality. I knew that he had ordered to remove the

high-ranked Jews from the army before and during the Great Patriotic War. They were arrested and executed. Since there were many Jewish commanders in the army, Stalin actually beheaded the army. We knew that the wives of many members of the government were taken to the GULAG. I think that Beriya [41](#) removed Stalin from his way. He did not have to kill Stalin. It was enough to not call a doctor to his attendance, when Stalin had another attack of his disease. Beriya was executed. Of course, I did not believe what Khrushchev said at once. I was thinking and comparing. However, I knew that what Khrushchev said was true, while many people did not believe it then and do not believe it now.

My acquaintances introduced me to my future wife. My wife Enna, nee Beilis, a Jew, was born in Kiev in 1921. Her father Volko Beilis was born in a village near Kiev. He was engaged in farming when he was young. Enna's mother was a housewife. After the revolution of 1917, when the Pale of Settlement was canceled, the family moved to Kiev. Enna was a middle sister of three of them: Tsylia, the oldest daughter, was born in 1916, and Lubov, the youngest one, was born in 1923. Their parents were religious and observed Jewish traditions, but their daughters grew up to be atheists. Tsylia and Lubov were members of the party. Tsylia worked in NKVD before the war. During the war she evacuated to Chelyabinsk region with her family. Her husband Matvey Basilovskiy went to the front. Tsylia had no information about him. When Kiev was liberated Tsylia returned home. Her husband returned in 1945. He told Tsylia that he was in German captivity in a concentration camp and that our army liberated him. At that time the wife of a former prisoner-of-war could not keep her job at the NKVD. Tsylia was fired, but the NKVD office offered her a job in the personnel department of a bed manufacturing factory. Her husband also found a job. People supported and helped them. Only our authorities had the position that former prisoners were traitors. Enna's sister Lubov was married. Her family name was Kaminer. Lubov worked at the personnel department of a knitwear factory. Her only son was severely ill, unfortunately. Tsylia died in 1968. Lubov died in 2002.

Enna and I got married in 1951. Enna's family was poor and we had to borrow money for the wedding. We had a common wedding. We had a ceremony at the registry office and in the evening we invited our close ones to the wedding dinner. I received an apartment from my plant. Our only daughter Svetlana was born in December 1952. In 1953, shortly after our daughter was born, Enna's father died. He was buried in Lukianovka Jewish cemetery [42](#) in Kiev: it was still open for burials.

When I turned 28 [the age of 28 was the end of Komsomol membership], I did not apply to the party. It was compulsory for key personnel to be members of the party and the town party committee watched that all managers were communists, but it was not quite necessary for workers. I worked decently and this was sufficient. My colleagues treated me with respect. At this time one could not go to the synagogue or celebrate Jewish holidays openly, but my wife and I celebrated holidays to the extent we could afford. It was difficult to get matzah for Pesach and we just had sufficient to keep it as a symbol of the holiday. We also had traditional Jewish food: sweet and sour stew, chicken broth, gefilte fish. It was a tradition, but also, the memory of my mama and grandma for me. It's hard to find words to describe how much I loved them and how I cherished my memories about the time, when they were with me... I went to Skvira on all anniversaries of their death. I suffered so thinking that mama and grandma did not live long for me to make their life easier and take care of them. It causes me pain, but it also gives me right memories about the time

we were together. Skvira is different from what it was like in the years of my childhood. They had destroyed the old town, but what they built instead is nothing special making it one of many small towns. The war destroyed everything I loved.

We celebrated Soviet holidays at home: 1 May , 7 November [October revolution Day] [43](#), Soviet army Day [42](#), New Year. Of course, my favorite holidays is Victory Day [44](#). If our army had not chased away the enemy from the USSR and other European countries the fascist black death would have spread all over the world. I had ambiguous feelings on this day. I was happy to have survived, of course, and have a family, have my daughter growing and then grandchildren, but there was always sadness and sorrow about those who became victims of this horrible war: my dear ones, friends and comrades. I always remember them. One cannot forget this.

Anti-Semitism, which mitigated after Stalin's death and during the Khrushchev's rule started growing again. I remember Khrushchev's visit to Kiev. He visited our plant. He made a tour of the shops and then asked without any confusion: 'How come you have so many Jews working here?' Later he repeated this question at the district party committee. Jews were removed from their high posts. Our shop superintendent, a very decent and highly qualified person, was fired. We missed him a lot. Our new superintendent was mostly engaged in conducting meetings where drunkards were condemned. Perhaps, this was also useful, but this was the only thing he did.

In the 1970s Jewish mass emigration to Israel began. When Israel was officially recognized as a state in 1948, the USSR was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Israel supporting it. However, at that time Jews were not allowed to leave the USSR. My uncle Gersh always wanted to move to Israel, but he died before he could implement his idea. He died in 1958 and was buried in the Jewish sector of the Baikovoye town cemetery. His daughters Vera and Inna moved to Israel and live in Jerusalem. Inna and I were friends and I was upset hearing that she was leaving. There was a war in Israel and there was little hope that it would ever end. However, they left. Her older son Mikhail had finished an Agricultural Academy in Kiev and got a job assignment [Mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [45](#) to work in a distant village in Kazakhstan. Inna knew he would never find a job in Kiev being a Jew. Her second son Vitaliy studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematic of the University, he did not have a hope to get a job in Ukraine either. Inna said that her sons would find work in Israel despite the war, but not here. This came true. They have a good life in Israel and have jobs. Mikhail has become chief veterinary doctor in Jerusalem. Of course, he could not even dream about this kind of career here. Mikhail loves Israel, but he misses Kiev: he grew up here and knows each street and stone. His daughter is a pharmacist and works in a pharmacy. Mikhail has grandchildren. Of course, it would be much better, if they could have their life here. Nobody can feel safe in Israel. They live every day as if they were at the front. Mikhail travels to Kiev every year and visits us, of course. Inna's younger son teaches physics in Tel Aviv.

My friends and acquaintances also left the country at that time. I sympathized with those, who decided to leave their home: everybody has the right to choose a place to live. I understood that many of them were escaping from anti-Semitism, because their children could not go to study in higher educational institutions and their parents could not find jobs. As for me, I was not considering leaving my home. I was a worker and faced no anti-Semitism. I grew up here, I fought for this country and my dear ones were buried here. I thought that my place is here and my wife shared my opinion.

My uncle Teviye died in 1976, his wife Hana did not live much longer. They were buried in the Jewish sector of the Berkovtsy cemetery. Gersh's wife Lisa is 104 years old.

Before perestroika I visited the place where my dear ones were buried every year. The Jewish cemetery was kept in order. I visit the graves in the cemetery and go to the monument on the common grave at the shooting spot. I recite Kaddish for the deceased and think about them. If only they were beside me... There are no more Jews in Skvira. In the early 1990s, when industry decayed, people could find no jobs, there were no pensions paid. Many people moved to Israel. Older people receive pensions and younger people found jobs. The others moved to where their children or relatives lived. There is nobody I can visit or talk to in Skvira...

After finishing school my daughter Svetlana studied in Kiev Industrial high school. After finishing it she worked as a rate setter at a plant and later she became an economist. Later she went to work as an economist at the district trade department. In August 1975 Svetlana married Igor Benyumov, a nice Jewish guy. Igor was born in Kiev in 1951. He finished a college and worked as an engineer. They had a secular wedding. Traditional Jewish weddings were very rare at that time. My older grandson Vladislav was born in 1977, and Mikhail, the younger one, was born in 1985.

In the late 1980s General Secretary of the CPSU Gorbachev [46](#) decided to change the course of the party and initiated Perestroika [47](#) in the USSR. Of course, not everything was right, but Perestroika brought much positive. I think that the most important thing is that the Jewish life revived during Perestroika. At first these were books of Jewish writers, which had not been published in the USSR since about the 1930s. There were plays by Jewish writers staged in theaters and there were concerts of Jewish music. We were happy about it. Jewish newspapers and magazines started to be published, and various Jewish societies were established. Of course, I did not appreciate the final outcome of perestroika, the break up of the USSR [in 1991]. But now, I think, the situation is getting better. The national segregation in Ukraine has mitigated. Jews can enjoy the freedoms and we are second-rate people no longer. However, there are outbursts of anti-Semitism like the attack on the Brodskiy synagogue in Kiev [in 2002 hooligans broke windows at the Kiev synagogue, and it is not known where this was a demonstration of anti-Semitism or just the hooliganism of drunk teenagers], desecration of Jewish cemeteries, but now we can talk about such occurrences and fight with them. It is most important that the state policy condemns such occurrences. There is a number of Jewish organizations, but the most significant among them for older people is Hesed [48](#). Jews get assistance from all over the world and Hesed is an evidence of this. At one time they were collecting questionnaires and assessing, who the war had affected at the utmost. They took the right decision: it's hard to provide for each and every one, but it's possible to provide for all. The Hesed helps us a lot. We also receive food packages and medical care. Hesed pays for surgeries and hospital bills. This is important since older people could hardly find such money. However, this is not all. The Hesed also takes care of the young generation. I have two grandchildren and one great grandson and Hesed did a lot to raise them Jewish. Svetlana's husband, my son-in-law, also works in the Hesed.

When the Jewish school was opened, my grandsons went to study there. They were eager to learn about Jewish traditions and the Jewish history. They also have classes where they study prayers. When in my older grandson's class the teacher asked who wanted to be circumcised, my grandson Vladislav was the first to raise his hand. The ceremony was conducted at the synagogue. My grandson went there with his father. At first the children had treatments and then the brit milah

was conducted. Later my younger grandson was also circumcised. My grandchildren are religious. They have everything a Jew needs for a prayer: a tallit and tefillin. My older grandson is married and has a son. He had a traditional Jewish wedding. Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Yakov Bleich conducted the wedding ceremony of my grandson. It was beautiful and festive: the holiday that they would remember for life. My grandson's son is 11 months old. He had a brit milah, as the Jewish tradition requires. My grandson and his wife observe Jewish traditions, go to the synagogue and pray. My younger grandson is also religious. My grandsons study at the International Solomon University [Jewish University in Kiev, established in 1995], a higher educational institution. It teaches highly qualified professionals and also, the students observe Jewish traditions, and study Jewish subjects. My older grandson has graduated from Law Faculty, and the younger one is a 2nd-year student. Their life is still ahead of them and I hope they will be all right.

I try to take part in the Jewish life. I subscribe to Jewish newspapers and magazines 'VEK' [monthly newspaper issued by the World Jewish Congress, circulation 5 000 copies], 'Evreyskie Vesty' ['Jewish news', the newspaper of the Jewish council of Ukraine, issued twice a month since 1990], magazine 'Ot Srdtsa k Srdtsu' ['From Heart to Heart', monthly magazine of the Chabad Lubavich movement, issued since 1992] and read them with interest. I also got enrolled in the organization of Jewish veterans of the war, when it was established in the Jewish cultural society. I attend all meetings of the organization. They are always interesting. Veterans share their memories; we watch movies and discuss what we have read. There are concerts and lectures. We celebrate Jewish holidays, Victory Day and the Soviet army Day. Though the average age of our veterans is 80, we try to be active. Our veterans often make speeches at schools and higher educational institutions telling young people about what things were like. This must not be forgotten or it may happen again. It cannot be allowed.

Glossary:

1 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

2 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.

3 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 World War I, 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.

4 Struggle against religion

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

5 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.

6 Jewish self-defense movement

In Russia Jews organized self-defense groups to protect the Jewish population and Jewish property from the rioting mobs in pogroms, which often occurred in compliance with the authorities and, at times, even at their instigation. During the pogroms of 1881-82 self-defense was organized spontaneously in different places. Following pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century, collective defense units were set up in the cities and towns of Belarus and Ukraine, which raised money and bought arms. The nucleus of the self-defense movement came from the Jewish labor parties and their military units, and it had a widespread following among the rest of the people. Organized defense groups are known to have existed in 42 cities.

7 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)

White Army general. During the Russian Civil War he fought against the Red Army in the South of Ukraine.

8 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.

9 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.

8 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.

9 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

10 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.

11 Collectivization in the USSR

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

12 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.

13 Jewish collective farms

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

14 Likbez

'Likbez' is derived from the Russian term for 'eradication of illiteracy'. The program, in the framework of which courses were organized for illiterate adults to learn how to read and write, was launched in the 1920s. The students had classes in the evening several times a week for a year.

15 Komsomol

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

16 Odessa

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were heders in 19 prayer houses.

17 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; Yury 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.

18 Order of Lenin

Established in 1930, the Order of Lenin is the highest Soviet award. It was awarded for outstanding services in the revolutionary movement, labor activity, defense of the Homeland, and strengthening peace between peoples. It has been awarded over 400,000 times.

19 Young Octobrist

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

20 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

21 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.

22 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.

23 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

24 Lenin (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

25 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

26 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.

27 Königsberg battle

It started in 6th April 1945 and was one of the greatest offensives. On the Soviet side the 2nd and the 3rd Belarussian and partly the 1st Baltic fronts participated in the battle, that was crucial and desperate. On 9 April 1945 the forces of the 3rd Belarussian front stormed and seized the town and the fortress of the city. The battle for Eastern Prussia was the most blood shedding campaign in 1945. The losses of the Soviet army exceeded 580 thousand people (127 thousand of them were casualties). The Germans lost about 500 thousand people (about 300 of them were casualties). After WWII, based on the decision of the Potsdam Conference (1945) the northern part of Eastern Prussia including Königsberg (since 1946 renamed as Kaliningrad) was annexed to the USSR. The southern part was annexed with Poland.

28 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

29 War with Japan

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

30 Order of the Great Patriotic War

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

31 Hero of the Soviet Union

Honorary title established on 16th April 1934 with the Gold Star medal instituted on 1st August 1939, by Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Awarded to both military and civilian personnel for personal or collective deeds of heroism rendered to the USSR or socialist society.

32 Residence permit

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

33 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

34 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

35 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

36 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'.

37 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.

38 Forced deportation to Siberia

Stalin introduced the deportation of certain people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

39 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

40 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

41 Lukianovka Jewish cemetery

It was opened on the outskirts of Kiev in the late 1890s and functioned until 1941. Many monuments and tombs were destroyed during the German occupation of the town in 1941-1943. In 1961 the municipal authorities closed the cemetery and Jewish families had to rebury their relatives in the Jewish sections of a new city cemetery within half a year. A TV Center was built on the site of the former Lukianovka cemetery.

42 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.

43 Soviet Army Day

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

44 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.

45 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.

46 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

47 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.

48 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.