

Aron Pizman

Aron Pizman

Mogilyov-Podolskiy

Ukraine

Date of interview: May 2004

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Aron Pizman is a stout man of average height with black moustache with gray streaks in his thick black hair. Despite his severe heart disease that made it hard for him to go through the strain of this interview he willingly agreed to talk about his life. Aron's wife Riva listened to his story and added details to it at times. The Pizmans live in a two-bedroom apartment in one of the 1970s built houses on the bank of the Dnestr River within the area of the former ghetto where Aron and his future wife's family lived during WWII. Their apartment is modestly furnished, but clean and cozy. Aron has his own work area with a desk and shelves with tools. He is very handy and likes crafting at his leisure time. Aron and his wife care for one another. Their younger son Mikhail, of whom his parents are very proud, lives separately with his family, but he comes to see his parents every evening after work. Mikhail's book of poems was published recently and Aron recites his poems with pleasure. He reads a lot: technical publications, fiction and scientific popular books. Aron is interested in politics and the situation in the world.

My father's family lived in Chernivtsi town Vinnitsa region 30 km north from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My grandfather Leib-Shikes Pizman was born in Chernivtsi in the late 1860s. I don't know my grandmother's name. She must have been the same age as my grandfather. I can hardly remember my father's parents. I don't know what my grandfather was doing for the living. My grandmother was a housewife, which was quite common for married Jewish women.

Chernivtsi was a small Jewish town. There were many such in Ukraine before WWII. Jews constituted about 70% of its population, I guess. Jews lived in the central part of the town. The houses adjusted closely to one another and there was space enough for a little garden where they grew greenery and 1-2 fruit trees. Ukrainians lived in the outskirts of the town having vegetable gardens and fruit orchards. There was a synagogue in the center of the town and a cheder nearby, which was closed after the revolution of 1917 [1] and the building was given to a 4-year Jewish primary school. There was a shochet and a market on Tuesday and Friday in the town. There were few stores owned by Jews selling day-to-day goods: salt, matches, kerosene and cereals. Jews spoke Yiddish to one another and Ukrainian with their Ukrainian neighbors.

My father Isak, Itzyk in Jewish, was born in 1909 and was the youngest in the family. He had two older brothers and 5 sisters. I didn't know my father's brothers. One of them, whose name I don't know, perished during the Civil War [2]. His brother Moishe Pizman moved to USA before the revolution and the family had no contacts with him. The oldest of the children was my father's sister Haya. Then came Mariam and the next were Ester, Pinia and Leya and then the sons were born. My grandfather and grandmother were religious like all other Jews in the town. The sons studied in the cheder and had bar mitzvah after turning 13. The family celebrated Sabbath and

Jewish holidays and followed kashrut. I don't know any details since all I know is what my father told me. The family was very poor and my father became an apprentice of a shoemaker at 8 and began to work at 10 years of age. Under the influence of his older brothers my father got fond of revolutionary ideas. His older brothers were the first to join the Komsomol [3] in the town, and my father followed into their steps, when he turned 14. Of course, my father and his brothers became atheists. I don't know whether my father's brothers had any education, but my father only finished cheder. He could not read or write in Russian or Ukrainian. My father moved to Mogilyov-Podolskiy at the age of 18, in 1927. He went to work as a shoemaker in a shop. At the beginning he worked in a crew of shoemakers and then got his own booth shop near the fire brigade in the town. My father did well at work. He was hardworking and had fair thinking, but he had no education.

My father's sisters, except Leya, married Jewish men and lived in Chernivtsi. They were housewives. Haya's husband, whose surname was Tepp, was a blacksmith. They had four children. My father's sister Mariam's husband Preger worked in Haya's husband's forge, but I don't remember what exactly job he did. They had three children. Samuel, the younger son, was born in 1925. I don't remember the names of two daughters. My father's sister Ester Bakaleinik divorced her husband and never remarried. She didn't have any children. Pinia, Zozulia in her marriage, had two sons: Abram, who was 5 years older than me, and Aron, the same age with me. Her husband was a butcher. My father's younger sister Leya married a Jewish man from Yaryshev, a Jewish town. I didn't know her first husband. He died young leaving Leya with three children. She married Brener, a tailor from Yaryshev and had four children with him. My father's sisters also became atheists under the influence of my father's brothers.

My grandmother died in the early 1930s and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Chernivtsi. My grandfather died few years later, in 1939, and was buried in my grandmother's grave. I was 8 years old and my parents took me to my grandfather's funeral. He was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions. My father recited the Kaddish over my grandfather. Nobody sat shivah after my grandfather. Their gravestone is still there in the cemetery in Chernivtsi.

My mother's family lived in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. This was a nice green town. The Jewish population constituted about 70%. There were few synagogues in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Two of them operated until the start of the Great Patriotic War [4], and the others were closed during the period of struggle against religion [5]. There was a Jewish cemetery, few cheders and Jewish schools. The cheder was closed before the revolution, and one Jewish school worked as long as the start of the Great Patriotic War. The Jewish school was more primitive than general education schools. I remember pupils of this Jewish school. They carried their textbooks and notebooks in wooden boxes on a leather thong that they carried over their shoulders. There was a hexagonal star on their boxes painted in ink. They looked like white crow among other schoolchildren. Since children needed to know Ukrainian and Russian to be able to continue their education, gradually Jewish children switched to Ukrainian schools in the town.

Mogilyov-Podolskiy is surrounded with the mountains. The Dnestr River divided the town. There was Moldavia on the left bank. Before 1917 Moldavia or [by its historic name] Bessarabia [6] belonged to the Russian Empire. In 1918 it was annexed to Romania and Mogilyov-Podolskiy became a border town. There were special permits required to enter Mogilyov-Podolskiy. In 1940 Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR.

Jews resided in the central part of the town. There were few market places in the town. The biggest market place in the center of the town worked 3 times a week. There was a shochet working nearby and housewives took the chickens they had bought to him to have them slaughtered. On Thursday and Friday villagers sold living chickens and fish at the market. They knew that Jewish housewives made chicken broth and gefilte fish for Sabbath and took their chance to earn more. Housewives often ordered dairy products from farmers and they delivered them to their homes. Jews in Mogilyov-Podolskiy were craftsmen like my father and owned small stores. There were also Jewish lawyers, teachers, doctors. My grandmother told me there was a big Jewish community in Mogilyov-Podolskiy before the revolution. The community supported the needy. The community made arrangements for funerals, supported the Jewish hospital and the children's home for Jewish children. They also provided dowries to Jewish girls from poor families and covered expenses for weddings. They collected contributions before Sabbath and Jewish holidays for poor Jews to have decent celebrations. The community stopped its existence after the revolution.

During the revolution and Civil war there were pogroms [7] in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My mother's mother Surah told me about one. There was a boy and a girl in the town - they had loved each other since they were children. They came from poor families and had no money for their wedding. The Jewish community and sponsors collected money for the wedding, bought a house with everything necessary for living for the young people and arranged a grand wedding party, when suddenly a Petliura [8] unit came into the town. They broke into the synagogue and killed the bride and bridegroom, the rabbi and all guests with their sabres. There were no survivors. This was a gang [9] from somewhere else - there were no local pogrom makers. Jews and other people had good neighborly relations with each other.

My maternal grandfather Leib Abramson, whom I didn't know, was born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1870. Grandmother Surah was born in 1872 in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Grandfather Leib was a cook and confectioner and cooked for weddings, birthday and other parties. He usually had a crew of assistants. My grandmother was a housewife. I cannot tell how much religious my mother's parents were. Before the war we had their only photo where my grandfather was wearing a yarmulke, a black suit and had a big beard. They observed Jewish traditions. My mother didn't tell me much about her childhood. She had a poor, hungry and hard childhood and these memories must have been hard for her. At the time that I remember my mother, her brother and sister and grandmother were not religious. They spoke Yiddish in the family and knew Ukrainian.

There were six children in the family. My mother was the youngest. My mother's oldest brother, whose name I don't know, moved to USA. The family had no contacts with him. Her two brothers were in the Red army and perished during the Civil War. I was named after one of them, whose name was Aron. I don't know the name of another brother. My mother fourth brother's name was Duvid. My mother's sister Rosa called Rosia in the family was born after Duvid. I don't know whether my mother's brothers had any education, but my mother and her sister had no education whatsoever. My mother Nehama was born in 1909. When she was six, her father Leib died in an accident in 1915. He was 45. When he was cooking for a wedding, the floor and the Russian stove [11] collapsed. My grandfather fell into the basement and pieces of the stove fell on him. He had many injuries. He was bedridden for some time before he died. The family spent all their savings on his treatment. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Mogilyov-Podolskiy according to the Jewish traditions. His grave and gravestone with an inscription in Hebrew are still there.

My grandmother began to work in the same crew where my grandfather worked before he died. The sons went to work, but then they joined the revolution. The younger daughters had to work around the house.

My mother's older brother Duvid got married and moved to a village in Vinnitsa region. He worked fixing and altering old clothes. Duvid's family had a good house, a vegetable garden and an orchard. Duvid had four daughters. During the Great Patriotic War the family was in the ghetto in their village. After the war Duvid's wife died and he remarried. His older daughter Rosa and her family live Luzhany village of Chernovtsy region and his three younger daughters moved to Israel. Duvid died in the 1980s visiting his daughter in Luzhany.

My mother's sister Rosa worked as a seamstress at the factory before the war. She had a prearranged wedding few years before my mother got married. I don't remember her family name. Her husband Shmil sang in the choir at the synagogue, when he was young. He was not religious, but had a nice tenor voice and knew music. When the synagogue was closed, Shmil went to work as a tax inspector. They had no children. Mama and Rosa were very close.

I don't know how my father and mother met, but this happened after he moved to Mogilyov-Podolskiy, of course. They fell in love with one another and decided to get married. My father's sisters were hoping that their brother would marry a wealthy girl and would support them, but he married a girl from a poor family who had no dowry. They could never forgive my father or mother for their lost hopes. Even when my father's sisters lived with us during the occupation since our house was within the ghetto, they were still very cold toward my mother.

My parents got married in 1929. They had a civil ceremony in a registry office and then had a small wedding dinner with their closest ones. My father's sisters and their husbands came to the wedding from Chernovtsy.

After the wedding my parents lived in the room that my father received from his work. They lived in the private house that became public property after the revolution. The former owner of the house also had an apartment in this house. She was a very beautiful and kind woman earning her living by handicrafts. Her surname was Kipnis. She and my mother became friends. I was born in 1930. My mother's older sister Rosa lived with her husband and grandmother Surah nearby. She was ill and could not have children. She offered my mother to move into their house to have more space and that they would move into our room. Rosa lived in a small house near the Dneestr. My father decided to build an annex to the house to make it bigger. We moved into the house in 1935. My father bought construction materials for the house, but the problem was that the area near the house was flooded every spring and my father decided it didn't make sense to start the construction, if the territory was flooded. In 1938 he sold this house and bought a part of the house in the center of the town near the market place in Stavisskaya Street. My mother wanted grandmother Surah to live with us. My father gave his consent and grandmother Surah moved in with us. There were three rooms and a kitchen with a Russian stove in the house. There was my parents' room, my grandmother and I lived in another room, and the third room was a living room. My younger brother David was born in 1939.

My father was an atheist and so was my mother. My brother and I were raised like all Soviet children. We celebrated Soviet holidays at home: 1 May, 7 November [12], the Soviet army Day [13]. My parents wore ordinary clothes and didn't have their head covered. We didn't observe

Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays at home. When my grandmother moved in with us, we began to celebrate Jewish holidays, but this was a tribute to tradition rather than religiosity. That is to say, I think we celebrated Jewish holidays then, though I don't remember them. On Sabbath my grandmother lit candles and prayed over them. She also cooked a special dinner and the family got together at the table. There were traditional Jewish dishes on the table: gefilte fish, chicken broth, chicken neck stuffed with flour and onions, it was particularly delicious, some potato puddings, but I can hardly remember. However, my mother did work about the house on Saturday like she did on any other day, and my father always worked on Saturday. He had a day off on Sunday. I remember that we had matzah at home on Pesach. It's hard to say whether we had traditional Jewish food at home. I had a poor appetite and any food looked repulsive to me. I felt obliged to mother and grandmother to eat and I did for their sake.

My parents had no education and in 1934 a visiting teacher began to teach my father under the likbez [14] curriculum. My mother and I were also present at these classes, and we also learned to read, write and count - everything that my father studied. I could read and write at the age of 5. In 1937 I went to a Ukrainian general education school. There was a 7-year school in our district, but my father wanted me to go to the 10-year school, but to be enrolled there I had to officially live in aunt Rosa's home since this school belonged to her district. So I was admitted to this school that was considered to be the best in the town. I liked going to school. Our young teacher Rosa Goldsmidt noted that I had been taught before school and made me her assistant. I was very proud of it and behaved decently in class. Only during the war, in the ghetto, I got to know that Rosa was a Jew. Before the war we didn't think about nationalities. I didn't identify myself as a Jew. We were taught that all citizens of the USSR had one nationality - Soviet. Now, when I recall school, I understand that there were many Jewish teachers and school children.

We were taught from the first form that there was no God, but this was nothing new to me since I heard it before from my father. We were also taught to explain that they were wrong believing in the non-existent God. I became a pioneer in the 3rd form. I was one of the first to become a pioneer - only pupils with good marks were admitted. Some children didn't care about their studies and some, like Yakov Epelbaum, whom I shared my desk with, just had no talent to study.

We were fond of reading and there were always lines in town libraries. I was fond of astronomy and learned by heart many astronomic constants. We didn't study physics and when I wondered why it was so that when women were washing sheets on the opposite side of the Dnestr and I saw them slapping their sheets on the water, but heard the sound of it later, I asked our school teacher of physics and he explained about the velocity of light and sound to me. Our teachers always answered our questions, even when they had to stay after classes to do it. We, kids, shared our interests with friends. We tried to read and know more. There were many hobby groups in the house of pioneers in Mogilyov-Podolskiy: the group of Voroshylov [15] rifle mark guys, airplane design group and music studios. To get enrolled in the group children had to show their pupils' mark books with good marks. We spent a lot of our free time in the house of pioneers. We learned a lot there, more than we did at home. I remember how happy I was, when I made my first flying model. My father helped me to make it. I think, he could have done more, if he had got education. Once I discovered that the projection of sketches painted on glass in ink sort of moved, when lighted by the flame of a candle. I showed it to my father and he made me a plywood box with inserted glass and a candle inside. My father and I made sketches and projected them onto the

wall. My father did everything very efficiently. He was a pace-maker worker at work and had awards of honor and also was given incentives like free trips to recreation houses. However, my father never joined the party. He believed sincerely that only the best could be communists while he, a common uneducated worker, did not deserve such honor.

Our family did not suffer from the arrests that started in 1936. [Great Terror] [16] Perhaps, some of my parents' acquaintances were arrested, but I was too young and did not think about it. Every now and then our teachers told us to over paint a portrait of a political activist or military commander in our textbooks, because he happened to be an enemy of the people [17]. We, kids, believed this was the right thing to do and everything was right in our country. Our teachers, radio and newspapers stated that our army was invincible and those who dared attack us would be in trouble. We would defeat the enemy on his territory and win a victory. Children and adults believed in it. We, junior pupils, were trained to march to march songs and handle gas masks. Senior schoolchildren studied military disciplines, assembly and disassembly of weapons, types of weapons, training grenades and first aid to the wounded.

In May 1941 I finished the 3rd form. On 18 May I went to the children's recreation center near Odessa. I was to come back home in the middle of July. On Sunday, 22 June 1941, around noon we noticed strange nervousness of adults: tutors and teachers. They were whispering and had the looks of concern. In the evening we had a gathering where they announced the start of the war and said that Hitler attacked the USSR without declaring war. The management of this recreation center did not have any directions for evacuation and they didn't quite know what they were supposed to do. Then they began to make groups of children to take them to their homes. I was the only one from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They took me to the railway station and then the group moved on and I stayed waiting for a train to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. There I found out that there were no passenger trains moving in my direction. I waited four days at the railway station until a captain, who came to the railway station to meet his family took me to his home and few days later he put me on a military train to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My mother met me. My father was recruited to the army on the first days of the war. He was still waiting at the gathering point in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. The recruits were trained in military disciplines. On our way home my mother and I saw the oil terminal on fire. There were air raids and firing. In the evening my father came home. His commanders allowed him to go and see me. My father never smoked before the war, but this time I saw him making a makeshift cigarette to smoke. He had to go back and before leaving my father said to mama: 'Take care of the children and try to take them as far as you can from the town'. We stayed at home few more days. One morning another air raid began and when it was over the radio announced that there was a train at the railway station for those, who wished to evacuate. My mother packed some clothes in rush. My grandmother refused to go with us. She told mama she would manage alone while my mother had to take care of her sons. At that time we already knew that Germans were killing Jews. There were no official announcements in this regard, but there were convincing rumors. Those, who remembered WWI, believed Germans to be a civilized nation and would do no harm to innocent people just because they were Jews. The three of us ran to the station, but there was no train there. Only after the war I got to know that the radio announced the evacuation after the last train had left Mogilyov-Podolskiy. At that time the radio was convincing people that escapists were creating panic working in favor of Germans while the party officials from the town council and town party committee were leaving with their families, but nobody knew it.

We went back home, but on our way we bumped into my grandmother. She said: 'Go away, go, run from Germans'. We went to Chernovtsy where my father's sisters Haya and Mariam lived. My grandmother stayed home. My brother was 2 years old and my mother carried him. He was a very handsome child. When we reached Karpovka village another bombing began. There was a column of retreating units walking along the road and one soldier took my brother from mama and carried him as far as the highway. We stayed a couple of days with aunt Haya. Few days later our retreating troops came into the village. My father was with them. He stayed that night with us and we all stayed awake talking with him. My father left with his unit shortly before dawn. This was the last time we saw him. In 1944, after liberation of Mogilyov-Podolskiy, we received a notification from the military registry office. It said that my father perished on 6 August 1942 near Semyonovskaya village Rzhev district Kalinin region and that his grave was in Bakhmutovo village: the local residents buried the deceased after the battle.

My mother went to Mogilyov-Podolskiy and picked my grandmother to come to Chernivtsi. Few days later German troops came into the village. The first few days were quiet, but then another troop came to baptize, the Jews of the town turning them into Catholic belief. The local residents were aware of some action to be. A Catholic priest came into the town, which meant there was something brewing up. Perhaps to conduct the ceremony - at least this raised people's concerns and doubts. [Editors' note: This must have been a popular fear that the Germans wanted to convert the Jews by force before they actually appeared in the town.] People took hiding in basements. The catholic priest wanted 10 people. The Germans started looking for Jews. Aunts Haya's neighbor, I think his surname was Mariasin, and his wife were captured. They were at home: his wife was baking bread and he stayed at home as well. So they opened the door, when Germans knocked on it and were seized. So there were 10 people seized in this way. They were taken to a dam, about 20 m high. At first they wanted them to lie along the dam so that the priest rode over them in his cab, but then they decided that horses could get scared and decided to throw them from the dam. They also fired at them. 10 people were killed so. [Editor's note: It is unlikely that a priest took such a role in the massacre.] This was middle of July 1941. We decided we had to go back to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. A group of about 60 people started on our way before dawn. There was an elderly woman with us. It was difficult for her to walk. My mother was carrying my 2-year old brother. I was carrying two sacks with our belongings. We were to go across Karpovka, 4 km from Mogilyov-Podolskiy, where there was a transit camp of Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia. They were the first to arrive in Vinnitsa region, Transnistria [18]. We were told back in Chernivtsi to share something with those poor people since they were starving. So I had potatoes for them in my pockets. In the village three teenage boys, shepherds, attacked me whipping me and trying to take away the sacks. I knew that we would starve to death, if we lost what we had and tried as much as I could to resist. They were older than me and I was desperate, when my mother and grandmother began screaming. Then our fellow travelers caught up with us. Men began yelling and the boys ran away.

In Karpovka we walked along the fence of the camp and I saw the inmates. They were living skeletons. I threw the raw potatoes that I had for them. They pounced on them and ate them instantly. When we passed the camp we saw a car with a Romanian officer, who started to say something in a loud angry voice. My grandmother and mother began to cry. He began to take out his gun pointing all the time in the direction of the ghetto. We were dirty and shabby and he

thought we escaped from the ghetto. We were sure he would kill us. Then another vehicle drove by. We knew this was a German military in it. Romanians had green uniforms and Germans had gray ones. My mother told him in Yiddish that we were going home. I don't know whether he understood or not, but he turned to the Romanian officer and slapped him on his face and left. We thought the Romanian would kill us for this slap, but he turned his car and left, too. We got home.

There was nothing left in it. There was a layer of feathers from pillows on the floor. We found my awards for 3 years of study, some textbooks and few books. The only food we had was the bread that we had from Chernivtsi. There was a rumor that the town department was going to release some herb, I don't remember the name, they feed horses on it. There was a cavalry unit in Mogilyov-Podolskiy and there were lots of stocks left. I ran to Ivanov, the town head, a Greek man, a former teacher of the 1st school. There were no people there yet. Perhaps, they didn't believe this rumor. Ivanov asked me questions about my family. I told him that my father was at the front and he directed to give me 10 kg of this grass for 5 of us, including my father. To cook it we had to keep it soaking in water a whole night and boil for a long while in the morning, but this was good food. We could not buy food at the market. Neither Soviet nor German money worked. We had no money whatsoever, but even if we did have it, there was nothing to buy for money since only goods or food products mattered. People exchanged food products for things. The only thing we had plenty of was salt. Salt was a big deficit then. When we returned from Chernivtsi, we saw bombed stores in the market square and in one I saw a heap of salt. I made few trips bringing it home in my shorts. We stored it in the attic. We had enough salt to last through the occupation. Our neighbors also could take it for free – my mother was no good at selling things. Even before the ghetto we were forbidden to go to the market place, so we could not exchange salt for food. Once I went to the market to buy something, when a Ukrainian policeman grabbed me and asked: 'Are you a zhyd?' I kept silent and he pushed me hard. I fell on the pavement and got injured. I came home bleeding and since then my mother was afraid of sending me to the market.

There was a flood in August 1941. The Dneestr flooded the nearby area and we went to stay with aunt Rosa for three days of the flood. Some houses were destroyed. Only stone houses survived. The walls and the floor in our houses were covered with a thick layer of silt and the walls were partially ruined. We went to stay with the Altmans, our neighbors. They let us have one room. My mother, my brother and I were sleeping on a bed and my grandmother slept on a narrow wooden trestle bed.

In July 1941 Jews from Bessarabia began to be going to Transnistria across our town. There were concentration camps and Jewish ghettos covering the whole area between the Dneestr and Bug. Many Jews were dying on the way, some of them stayed in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Those, who died in the town were buried in the new Jewish cemetery. According to the official data there are 20000 burials in this cemetery. There were few Jewish families staying in the house where we lived. Everybody asking for help found shelter in the house.

We had to somehow earn our living. Those Bessarabians staying in the Altmans' house had acquaintances in Ataki, a Moldavian town on the opposite bank of the Dneestr, bringing them contraband cigarettes and tobacco leaves. I learned to cut them finely. At first my hands were sore, but then I got used to this work and did better. I could earn 1-2 mugs of corn flour per night's work. My mother boiled it and this made our basic food. There was a Jew from Bukovina living with our

neighbors. They were the family of Shames. He was a roofer, but since there was no roofing work he became a tinsmith making buckets and painting them to make them fit for keeping potable water in them. I watched him working and learned to make tin items. I could even earn 2 marks per day. A mug of corn flour cost 0.5 marks.

That winter when we lived with the Altman family, Germans killed all Jews in Bar town near Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Altman wife Mania's brother Aron and his family lived in Bar. Mania cried and cried knowing that there were hardly any survivors. A week later Aron came. He wasn't even wounded. He fainted and fell into the pit. His family perished. There were dead bodies falling on him and he almost suffocated. He was covered with somebody else's blood that dried out on him. He could only walk at night, and it took him a week to get to our place. He looked like crazy: he didn't talk to anybody a whole month and had a wild look in his eyes. It was hard to look at this young handsome man. When Mogilyov-Podolskiy was liberated he volunteered to the front. He perished in 1944.

There were continuous shootings in surrounding villages. I don't know by what miracle Mogilyov-Podolskiy avoided it. There were about 500 Jews in Yarysev town in 18 km from us. On 21 August 1942 they were shot on the outskirts of the town. There were no survivors. Our 18 relatives and my father sister Leya Berner's family perished there. The shooting was done by Ukrainian policemen and volunteers. Germans only issued the order. The Ukrainians moved into the houses and kept everything in them in their possession. We must not forget this.

Shortly after the flood a ghetto was made in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. There was an order for all citizens living beyond the boundaries of the ghetto to move to the ghetto. We were not allowed to leave the ghetto and Ukrainians were not allowed to come into it. In spring 1942 a high wooden fencing with barbed wire on top of it was installed and the ghetto was guarded. People said the barbed wire was powered. There was one wide gate and two smaller ones with armed policemen guarding them. There was a children's home on the other side of the fence. There was a tap in the yard where we could take potable water. The children were dying every day. Standing in line to get water we often saw a horse-driven wagon loaded with dead bodies They tied them with ropes to fix in the wagon and buried them in common graves in the cemetery far away from the town.

During spring and summer 1942 my mother and I were putting the house in order. We cleaned the silt and dug some clay mixing it with horse manure – this was the only construction material available. I picked manure in the streets beyond the ghetto. I walked with a spade and a sack picking manure. Once I bumped into Shpakovskaya, the worst pupil in our class. Another boy saw me and began to yell: 'Let's feed this manure to this zhyd!' and Shpakovskaya said: 'Leave him alone. This is zhydovsky [Jewish] jam. Let him take it home'. Then I found some stables where there was a lot of manure. I could take home half a sack. Once I was captured by a Romanian officer. He began to whip me. At that time another Romanian man came in and said something. This Romanian that was whipping me, left and the other one poured some water on me to make me regain my senses. He let me go. I got to a yard and lay down. I couldn't walk. I don't know how long I was there, but then I brought this sack home. This was the last time I went to the stables. My mother and I restored the house, the walls and windows and moved in it in autumn.

My father's sister Ester and Pinia and their sons Aron and Abram also were taken to the ghetto from Chernivtsi. They stayed in our house. Our family of four of us lived in the smallest room in our

house – about 6 square meters. Some time later my mother's sister Rosa and her husband Shmil came to live with us. Their house was beyond the boundaries of the ghetto and they had to move to the ghetto. They lived in a big room. Rosa's neighbor Riva Snitman, her son Haim and daughter Hana lived in the kitchen. There were few families in the bedroom: Riva Snitman husband's sister with two children, the Dorf couple with their daughter and Dorf wife's sister, and my aunt Ester. Pepi and Malvina, a brother and sister from Bessarabia, were also there. There was a family from a village living with my aunt Rosa, I don't remember their surname. There were 5 of them: the father of the family, his wife called Rosa, the Tall one, to distinguish between her and my aunt Rosa, the short one, and their three children. There was also David, a young man from Bukovina, living with them. He had a big bag full of religious books in Hebrew and no other belongings. David slept coiling up on a low table in our room. Aunt Haya and her children and aunt Mariam lived with the Altmans.

We were trying to exchange food products. My mother's sewing machine saved us from starving to death. It was buried in saw dust and got a little rusty during the flood, but I polished it for my mother to work on it. My father had some underpants and my mother colored them and made some simple blouses and pants. She also altered old clothes. My mother sister Rosa's husband Shmil exchanged my mother's pieces of work for food at the market. I also made rings with little hearts and Shmil sold them. We were all swollen and had swollen feet since we drank lots of hot water to mitigate the hunger.

My mother became religious in the ghetto and remained religious till the end of her life. There was my grandmother's prayer book in the house, and my mother began to pray every day. She always prayed during air raids or firing. We could not celebrate Jewish holidays in the ghetto, but my mother tried to follow the rules. We all, even my little brother, fasted on Yom Kippur. However hard life we had, my mother always tried to make matzah for Pesach.

A Jewish religious school, talmud torah, began to work in the ghetto in 1942. There were all levels of education: from primary to the higher level enabling to work as a rabbi at the synagogue. We were attracted to it since they gave two slices of bread and jam to its pupils and the best students had four slices. This school was funded by the head of the Romanian Jewish community. I don't remember his name. My brother and I attended it through the whole time of its operation.

In autumn 1943 there was an epidemic of enteric fever in the ghetto. My mother and I, my grandmother, my little brother and David, who lived with us in the room, fell ill. Many of our neighbors were also ill. Many people died from it. We survived thanks to our dairy woman, who used to bring us milk before the war. She found us in the ghetto and brought us milk. She came few times. My grandmother died a week later. My mother had high fever and could not even come to the cemetery. Uncle Shmil buried my grandmother in the cemetery. Later we installed a gravestone on her grave. David also died. Every day 150-200 people died in the ghetto. We were on our way to recovery.

Soon after we recovered we got in a big trouble. One night we saw that one wall in the shed in the yard was gone. Somebody must have taken it for the wood to stoke a stove. We decided also to use it for wood, but then a policeman came by. He said that all facilities were the property of German Empire and we had no right to pull down the shed. He put down our name and said that my mother would be taken to jail in Tiraspol. My mother asked our neighbors whether they knew

this policeman. Our neighbor Haim Gorin happened to know him well. He went to talk with the policeman and asked him to not send my mother to jail since she had two small children. The policeman said he would stop the proceedings, if we paid him 150 marks. This was a lot of money and we had to ask our neighbors to lend us the money. We gave him the money and later we had to return the debts in money or doing work for people for a whole year. But my mother stayed at home.

I remember a terrible happening in winter 1943. There were severe frosts and the Dnestr froze. There was an ice-hole from where we fetched ice for cooling cells where we kept food products. There were always people lining to get water and ice. A young woman from Bukovina filled one bucket with water and bent to fill another, when she slipped and fell into the hole. She drowned. No one took water from this hole on that day. On the next day people made another hole farther from the previous one.

There was a rumor in the ghetto about the Vlasov troops [19] coming. They were worse than fascists living bloody tracks behind. We made a shelter in the house between the kitchen and the adjusting room. It closed with shelves kitchen utensils on them on the side of the kitchen. To enter it we removed utensils from the lower shelf to remove the wall. That opened the entrance to the shelter. My mother and I made this shelter and also made one for the Altmans.

There was a judenrat [20] and Jewish police in the ghetto. They were the most brutal ones. To Romanians we were all alike while the community and the police were local and knew each of us. The community was responsible for making lists for deportation to the Pechora death camp [This concentration camp is known as the 'Dead Loop'. In total about 9000 people from various towns in Vinnitsa region were kept in the camp. Inmates hardly got any food and the building had no heating. About 2 500 Jews were taken away by Germans for forced labor. None of them returned. In March 1944 Soviet troops liberated the camp. There were 1550 survivors left.] receiving this order from Romanians. There were Bessarabian inmates to be sent to Pechora, but the community sent inmates from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Bessarabian Jews had money and valuables to pay ransom. The Romanians called such bribes 'gifts'. Bessarabian Jews also spoke Romanian and had no communication problems. We heard that we were to be deported to Pechora. My mother knew this meant death to us. The locals supported each other as much as they could. Soviet people learned to help each other charging no money for it. When we heard about the deportation, my mother felt like committing suicide, but my aunts told her that she had children to think about. We decided to ignore the order. Early in the morning on the day of deportation we walked to Ozarintsy 10 km north-east of Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My mother dressed up as a Ukrainian farmer woman. Our distant relative Aron Shisman lived there. He accepted us all: aunt Ester, aunt Pinia and her children and us. My mother began to sew for Aron and clients. She was paid with food products and so we earned our food. My mother and I also made a shelter for them.

Two months later we returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. The deportation was over and we were hoping that Romanians would not send us to Pechora. Hey killed those who ignored their orders, but if some time passed, they forgot about such faults. There was also a risk that one of the community would report on us. There were such incidents, and then such inmates were sent to Pechora anyway, but nobody reported on us, and we kept living in our room. Then my mother fell ill. She had a big furuncle in her armpit. It hurt and she had fever. A Jewish doctor from Bukovina

visited my mother, but since there were no medications available, he told my mother to stay in bed and left. After he left we found 3 marks under my mother's pillow that he left. This was the cost of 6 mugs of corn flour – quite a fortune. Few days later this doctor returned. He said my mother could go to the town hospital department for Jews. I took my mother to the hospital. Aunt Rosa took care of my brother and me in my mama's absence. She began to sew and provide food for us. My mother had meals in the hospital. I went to visit my mother every day. On my way to the hospital I picked apricots for her, though they were not ripe. Mama left her bread to give it to me, when I came. Two weeks later mama returned home and began to sew.

On 18 March 1944 there was news that the Soviet army was advancing and that the ghetto was to be eliminated before they reached this area. There was an order issued to eliminate the camp. Germans and Romanians were retreating crossing the Dnestr over the bridge. All inmates of the ghetto hid in their shelters standing close to one another. There was no air to breathe and if somebody felt like sneezing he had to leave the shelter to save the others. My brother and I were on the attic ready to escape to the shelter every instant. We watched the bridge. Germans and Romanians were arguing who was the first to walk on the bridge. They started shooting. Later that night the bridge was blasted with all Germans, Romanians, horses, wagons, tanks and cannons on it. About an hour later the railway bridge was blasted and everything got quiet. My brother and I stayed in the attic. At dawn there were few shots heard in the vicinity of the cemetery and then everything got quiet again. Soon 3 Soviet tanks entered the town. This happened on 19 March 1944. One tank stopped near our house. My brother and I went down and climbed on it. The tank men gave my brother and me their earphones and turned on the radio 'Moscow speaking'. We hadn't heard it for 3.5 years. "Moscow speaking" – and this was a miracle.

There were heaps of weapons and ammunition in the streets that German left. People were picking them. Then there were 'heroes' searching for the Romanians that hid away. My mother and we were standing near our house, when 3 Romanians went by convoyed by a local Jewish man with a gun. When they were passing by, he shot one Romanian on the back of his head and he fell in front of mama. She screamed and the Jew pointed his gun at her. One could tell this man was out of his mind. He shot another Romanian, when they were passing the next house.

Soviet troops came to Mogilyov-Podolskiy and people came out into the streets. They were happy. A crowd of people came to the bank of the Dnestr to greet their liberators. Then snipers began to shoot from the opposite bank of the Dnestr. Germans left many snipers. They shot with explosive bullets that were deadly. They wounded many people. There were no doctors or medications. The doctors, who were on the bank, could only apply iodine on the wounds. The snipers were shooting for few days before few young soldiers swam across the Dnestr and killed them.

After liberations the town was bombed several times. One night the bomber planes dropped termite balls that were burning hanging in the air brightly lighting the whole town. There were few buildings ruined near our house. We discovered deep pits in the morning. Fortunately, our house was all right.

About a month after liberation bread cards were issued. We received about 1 kg bread for the three of us. Besides, we received about 100 or 200 g fat per month, and occasionally we got jam and herring and also, 20-30 matches. So, we were safer and did not fear starving to death any longer.

In April 1944 schools opened and I went to the 3rd form. The children had forgotten a lot and even made mistakes in counting. There were no notebooks. I found a pile of Romanian orders printed on cigarette paper in an abandoned archive and wrote on the backside. Then there were thin 4-page notebooks sold in stores. We wrote in small letters to save the paper. We also made ink buying methylviolet at the market and making a solution with water. A year later my brother went to the 1st form of my school.

Aunt Rosa and her husband stayed with us. My mother and aunt sewed and Shmil sold their products at the market. After receiving the notification on my father's death my mother began to receive a pension of 340 rubles. This was good money for this time. We bought potatoes and corn flour at the market. The most important thing was that we were confident of our future and had no fear any longer. We had all rights and understood that we had them. Young people can hardly imagine the life, when one fears being killed day after day.

After Vinnitsa region was liberated my sisters returned home to Chernivtsi. Aunt Haya became very religious after the war. She celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut strictly. Her husband was not religious, but he was loyal to her religiosity. The rest of my father's sisters remained atheists. Aunt Rosa died in 1962. She was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery in Mogilyov-Podolskiy, near my grandmother's grave. Her husband remarried after the mourning and moved to live with his wife. We didn't keep in touch with him.

After finishing the 3rd form I passed exams for the 4th form that same summer and went to the 5th form in autumn. On 22 February 1946 I quit school before finishing the 6th form. My mother managed to find me an employment as a clock repair man apprentice. My friend's father was a clock repair man in this shop. My mother sold my father's coat that he got before the war and paid the man to employ me. I received a worker's food card at work. The shop I worked in worked for NKVD [21] employees. I bought 6 loaves of bread receiving my first salary and there was no money left. We ate them in one day.

There was famine in 1946. The draught ruined the crops. Each organization was given a plot of land and seed grains to grow their own crops. Employees went to fields to seed potatoes and corns. I picked river oysters on the Dnestr that we cooked. They didn't taste well, but at least they satisfied our need in proteins. We somehow survived through this year, and in 1947 the card system was cancelled and there were many food products including an assortment of bread in stores. Besides working in the shop, my friends and I worked on the Dnestr. The bridge across the river was ruined. There was a ferry, but it commuted rarely. My friends and I took people across the river in boats. Many people from Mogilyov-Podolskiy had jobs in Ataki or vice versa. The border existed no longer. We came to the Dnestr after worked and took 8-10 people in one trip across the river. 8-Life was hard. We didn't have any clothes or shoes, but many people lived like this at that time and we didn't feel disturbed about it.

In 1948 we heard that Israel was established officially and acknowledged by all countries in the world. We were happy to know that we had our own country. I had a dream to go Israel and take part in the construction, but this was no more than dreaming since I was the only breadwinner in the family and could not leave my mother and brother behind.

In 1949 I was appointed a crew leader. I passed the qualification commission and received a crew of four people. I was awarded the highest category of qualification and got a raise. I found it interesting to restore old clocks, even those that older masters refused to restore.

I had many friends: my former classmates and my colleagues. We went to a gym together and in summer spent time on the Dnestr. I also met my future wife Riva Gershberg in this company of young people. Riva was the same age with me and came from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Her mother Golda Gershberg, nee Weinstein, was also born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1891. I didn't know Riva's father, whose name was Shloime Gershberg. He was born in 1891. Riva's mother owned a small food store before the revolution. After the revolution the state took away her store and she learned to sew. This is what she did for a living. There were four children in the family. Riva was the youngest. She had two older brothers Gersh and Moisey, born in 1920 and 1921, and sister Anna, born in 1926. Riva's father fell severely ill, when she was small. He was paralyzed. Riva's mother had to raise four children and look after her paralyzed husband. Before the war Riva's brothers were recruited to the army, and Riva and her sister and mother stayed in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They were kept in the ghetto until 1942, when Riva's parents and Riva were taken to the Pechora concentration camp, and Riva's older sister Anna was taken to a German labor camp in Vinnitsa region. Riva's father died in Pechora in 1942. Riva and her mother managed to escape from Pechora and return home. They stayed in the ghetto in Mogilyov-Podolskiy till the end of the war. Riva's sister also managed to escape from the concentration camp. The prisoners of this camp worked at the construction of a road in Vinnitsa region. They died from hunger and diseases and were replaced with others. Anna was a pretty girl, and Ukrainian policemen helped her to escape. After the war Anna married a Jewish man from Vinnitsa and moved to her husband. Her family name was Nudrina. Riva's brothers perished at the front: Gersh - in 1944, Moisey - in January 1945, shortly before the war.

Upon liberation of the town Riva went to work as a lab assistant at the butchery. She also studied in an evening school. The school was far from her house. I met Riva near her school after classes and accompanied her home. I met Riva's family and they liked me. In 1949 we got married. Riva's mother was an atheist while my mother became religious during the war. My mother insisted that Riva and I had a traditional Jewish wedding. The synagogue did not operate after the war, but there was a secret prayer house. The rabbi lived across the street from our house. He often came by asking me to fix household things for him. He was a very nice and intelligent man and we often had interesting discussions. Riva and I had a civil ceremony in the district registry office, but lived at our homes for a whole month before the Jewish wedding.. I made my wife a wedding ring from a silver spoon. We had a chuppah installed in the yard. My mother invited the rabbi to conduct the wedding ceremony. After the wedding Riva moved in with us.

I remember only one occurrence related to the struggle against cosmopolitanism [23] that started in the USSR in 1948. I liked Ilia Erenburg [24], a writer. He wrote a book "War" after the war. Since he lived in France for a long time he described what was happening in Paris. He was accused of cosmopolitanism and declared guilty for describing events in Paris rather than what was happening in the USSR. There was a meeting of the Union of writers where many of his colleagues made accusing speeches about the book and the author. Erenburg asked the floor at the end of the meeting. He was allowed to take the floor and said he wanted to read a reference to his books written by one of his readers. They said they didn't want to hear any references since Soviet

writers had to educate their readers, but not vice versa. However, Erenburg read the letter: "I read your book, when I was on vacation. This is a very good book and I will read it again if I have time". And signature: "Iosif Stalin". And the meeting ended at that. There may have been innocent people among those who suffered at this period, but I don't agree that all of them were innocent. One can say whatever nowadays, but I do not believe that all "cosmopolites" were innocent.

In 1951 I was recruited to the army. I passed the military commission in the military registry office and was sent to an Air Force unit as a gunman. I went to a military school in Poltava [250 km from Kiev]. However, they had already completed the department of gunmen and I was not admitted. I was sent to the school for motor mechanics in Poltava, but later the school moved to Mirgorod [about 300 km from Kiev]. I joined Komsomol at school. I finished the school with honors in 1952. I learned the mechanic part of planes promptly and was authorized to prepare a group of 10 backward cadets to the exams in aerodynamics and operation of planes. I spent a lot of time with these cadets and they passed their exams well. I was promoted to a sergeant and had the right to choose the location of my further military service. I requested Poltava. For excellent finishing school and support of my fellow students I was allowed a leave. I spent it with my wife at home, of course. She was pregnant and the baby was due soon. On 11 January 1952 I got news from home that I had a son and on 13 January I took my military oath. We named our son Igor. My wife quit her evening school. I insisted that she did. 9 forms at school are sufficient for a housewife, and I didn't want my wife to ever go to work. I believed I was capable of providing for the family, and a wife is to be a good housewife, mother and a family guardian.

There were not sufficient air planes in Poltava, and I worked as a part-time motor mechanic for some time. Later they received new planes and I was made responsible for technical maintenance of one plane. I have the very best memories of my 4-year service in the army.

I was the only Jew in the squadron. I only faced anti-Semitism twice. The first time was in the train on the way from Poltava to Mirgorod after finishing the motor mechanic school. We were traveling in freight train roofless railcars. The orderly replaced each other every two hours. When it was my turn, I saw that my predecessor had not cleaned the railcar. I told him that I would only start my shift after he cleaned the railcar and he replied: 'You, zhydovskaya morda! [mug rude], can sweep the floor yourself'. I went crazy, grabbed him and dragged him to the door. I felt like throwing him off the train, when my fellow comrades interfered and pulled me away from him. When the train stopped, our company commanding officer asked what it was all about and I told him. My fellow comrades confirmed that I was telling the truth. This guy was taken away from us. When we arrived at Poltava, he was put in a guardhouse and later taken to another military unit.

Another incident happened during my service in Poltava. I was assigned to an airplane to support its maintenance. There is also a board engineer, and the one, who worked with me, happened to be an anti-Semite. He kept picking on me without reason, and it upset me, until finally something happened that was the last drop. When we were to step onto the wing of the plane, we had to put on valenki [warm battered sheep wool felt boots] boots to prevent the surface from scratching. This was late summer, and it was frosty. The plane was covered with a tarpaulin tent that froze to the plane at night. The board engineer ordered me to get on the plane and hit the tent with a rubber hose to break the ice. We broke the ice, but there were pieces of it left and I said I would not remove the tent since the crystals of ice might turn the surface of the wing into a grater. He

commented: “You, zhydy, don’t want to do anything, and you are great in finding reasons for doing nothing’. This drove me mad. I grabbed the hose and ran after him. He ran away. The guys from our crew captured me: ‘What are you doing!’ I was screaming that I would kill this beast. They took me to the barrack, and the rumor about this spread in the whole squadron. The board engineer reported to the commandment that I threatened him with physical violence, and he was an officer. This was a direct violation of the statute. In the evening Colonel Kobkin, commander of the squadron, a tall and handsome man, 1 class pilot called me to his office. I told him about what happened and about the previous fault-findings. I asked him to not send me to work with this engineer threatening to kill him. I said, even in fear of prison or death sentence I would kill him. He must not live and he had no right to live after what we had to endure during the war. I was kept in the ghetto 3.5 years and heard the word ‘zhyd’ from fascists, but I did not want to hear this from a Soviet anti-Semite officer! Kobkin listened to me and ordered me to stay in the barrack. Few days later I was notified that as a punishment I was transferred to another air field in Melitopol [about 350 km east of Kiev]. My offender was ordered to resign, though I was just a sergeant and he was a lieutenant. So one had to fight against anti-Semitism to find justice rather than keeping silent and hanging one’s head to it.

In January 1953 the ‘doctors’ plot’ [25] began. I was serving in Melitopol. We had political classes each week where they read us articles about ‘murderers in white robes’ and readers’ letters. I believed this was true and so did many others, I guess. We used to believe newspapers, particularly, such serious things. After Stalin’s death and Beria’s [26] denunciation we were told that everything that had been said about these doctors was wrong. They were rehabilitated [27], though some of them - posthumously. After Stalin’s death and Beria’s arrest the party organizer of one squadron said at a meeting that he was indignant at how mean Beria was starting this ‘doctors’ case’ since we all thought then: ‘here what Jews can do!’ I stood up and said: ‘You thought so and we didn’t. Even if these Jewish doctors were murderers, what does it have to do with all Jews? General Vlasov gave up 2 armies to Germans, but this is no ground for us to think that all Russians are traitors. Maybe these Jewish people are criminals, but because few people are criminals you cannot believe the whole nation to be such’. The party organizer reported this case to the commandment. There was a Komsomol meeting where they discussed what I said. I repeated what I said and the political officer of the regiment supported me. The party organizer was transferred to another military unit.

When Stalin died, there was no indifferent person in the whole regiment. This was a common grief and everybody cried. We loved Stalin dearly and believed him to be the greatest of men and I still believe the same. The arrests that happened were justified. I don’t know - perhaps, there were innocent people among them< I wouldn’t say there weren’t, but on the whole, these arrests were justified and necessary. We could hardly imagine our life without Stalin. All leaders of our country after Stalin looked miserable. After the 20th Party Congress [28], when Nikita Khrushchev [29] denounced the cult of Stalin, many people changed their attitude to Stalin, but not me.

I got another leave in 1954. My son was 2 years old. I spent a month with my wife and son and was happy. The last year of my service was in Germany, at an Air Force aerodrome in a little town near the Eastern Berlin. I was an electric mechanic there. A year later I demobilized and returned home on 12 November 1955. On 7 December I went to work at the food industry equipment plant in Mogilyov-Podolskiy and worked there 46 years. I started as a laborer, then I worked as a tinsmith

and a mechanic. I joined the party in 1958. I also passed exams for the 6th form of school and went to the 7th form. I always liked to study and had all excellent marks at school, though I was always pressed for time. After finishing school I wanted to go on studying. In 1960 the plant sent me to study in Moscow extramural all-Union machine tool College. My wife was pregnant. My younger son Mikhail was born in 1961. My wife and I were atheists and did not observe any Jewish traditions, including circumcision.

My wife and sons moved into my wife mother's house near the railway station. My younger brother lived with my mother while my mother-in-law suffered from loneliness. There were hardly any comforts, but we were young and healthy and took it easy.

I passed my entrance exams to the College and entered the machine tool manufacture faculty. I also worked as a tool mechanic at the plant and studied by correspondence doing written tests during a year and then I had exams in June. I stayed 40 days in Moscow, doing practical work and taking exams and credits. The plant covered a part of my expenses. My younger brother David also entered this college with me after finishing 10 forms of school. On 13 April 1964 my brother and I obtained diplomas of production technicians of instrument manufacture. I was promoted to the shop production engineer and soon afterward I became a shop foreman. In 1969 I was appointed tool shop superintendent. I was always interested in design. Few years later I went to work as a design engineer in the design office of the plant.

My brother went to work as a dispatcher at this same plant. He was doing well at work. In 1965 my brother married Anna Narolskaya, a Ukrainian girl from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They had a secular wedding. My brother went to work at the wine factory in Bronnitsa village near the town. In 1969 our mother died. At her request we buried her according to Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My mother's grave is near grandmother Surah and my mother sister Rosa's graves - 3 graves within one fence. My brother recited the Kaddish over our mother's grave. He learned the words by heart since he didn't know Hebrew. That same year my brother's first baby was born. He was named Nathan, after our mother - the first letters of their names are the same. My brother's daughter Zhanna was born in 1972. During perestroika [30], when an anti-alcoholic campaign began, many vines were destroyed and wineries closed. My brother's factory was closed. My brother went to work as a production engineer in the assembly shop at the plant. In the late 1980s my brother and his family emigrated to Israel. They live in Ashdod. David and his wife Anna are pensioners. David's son Nathan perished in the Israel army in 1992. Zhanna is married. She and her husband work. Zhanna has two children. My brother became religious after our mother died. He learned Ivrit, read the Torah, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut and continued this in Israel. We correspond, but my rather hardly writes anything about their life and his family. We rather have a theoretical correspondence: I stand to my atheist views and my brother defends his religious views.

My sons were raised like all Soviet children. They became young Octobrists [31], pioneers and then joined Komsomol at school. We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays, but we celebrated Soviet holidays at home and at work. We had guests at home. On 1 May and 7 November my wife and sons and I went to parades with other employees of the plant. On Victory Day [32], 9 May, we went to the meeting with veterans of the war on bank of the Dnestr, near the tank that was the first to enter Mogilyov-Podolskiy on 19 March 1944. We also celebrated New Year and family birthdays.

We usually spent family vacations at the seashore in the south. We sometimes bought tours or just rented rooms there. Sometimes my wife and I and later our sons joined us to go to Bakhmutovo village where my father was buried. We installed a gravestone on his grave. The villagers take care of the graves – they are good people. They keep the area in order and plant flowers.

My sons studied in a Russian general education school. After finishing school my older son Igor was recruited to the army. He served in the communication forces in Subcarpathia. We visited him on the day, when he took his military oath. Occasionally I stayed few days with him. After demobilization Igor returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. He went to work at the plant as a turner apprentice and later became a turner. My younger son wanted to continue his studies. We knew that he would have problems with entering a college in Ukraine. There was still strong anti-Semitism and it was hard for Jews to enter higher educational institutions. The situation was better in Russia. I went on business to a plant in Voronezh back in 1970. I liked the town and the people, and when it was time for Mikhail to take a decision, I said we would go to Voronezh. Mikhail passed exams to the Voronezh Polytechnic university and was admitted to the Engineering Mechanic Faculty. There were no vacant beds in the hostel and we rented a room for my son. My wife and I visited him in Voronezh and so did his older brother. My wife and I also spent vacations in Voronezh. My older son met his future wife in Voronezh. Yevgenia, nee Minkin, was born in Voronezh in 1948. She was a little older than my son. She worked as an accountant in a construction department. They got married and my son moved to Voronezh. In 1982 their son Pavel was born, and in 1985 – daughter Svetlana. My son worked at the Voronezh mechanic plant. Now they live in Haifa in Israel. They had to move to Israel. Their son Pavel didn't have appropriate attention from his parents. They were busy at work and did not watch how he was doing at school. I believe that parental control is necessary. After finishing school my grandson was going to enter a college to avoid the mandatory military service. At that time Russia was in the state of war with Chechnia. There are many colleges in Voronezh and Pavel would have managed had he proper knowledge, but Pavel failed at the entrance exams. This meant that he was to go to Chechnia, and there was little chance that he would survive, particularly that he was a Jew. Chechen people are Muslims. Then Pavel heard that in Moscow they were generating lists of Jewish young people, who wanted to study in Israel after finishing school. He passed the interview successfully and went to Israel. My son and his family decided to go with him. I didn't approve of their departure, but this was their decision. They live in Haifa. My son works at a factory, but his wife cannot find a job. Pavel served in the army. He is going to enter the university of Tel Aviv. Svetlana is finishing school and will go to the army. She will have time to decide what she wants to do in life.

My younger son returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy after finishing his studies. He went to work at the design office of our plant. My son is a very talented engineer. In 1986 Mikhail married Lilia Weinstock, a local Jewish girl. They had a secular wedding. My son and his wife decided to live separately from us. In 1988 their older daughter Tatiana was born and in 1992 – their younger daughter Nathalia. Lilia is a housewife. Mikhail works at the plant. Mikhail has been fond of poetry since childhood and composed poems. He recently had a book of his poems published and the book had positive references from critics. We often visit Mikhail and his family, and our granddaughters often come by. They play the violin. Tatiana finished a music school and took part in contests of violinists. This year she is finishing school, and will go to a music vocational school. Our younger daughter studies in a music and general education schools. She goes on tours with

our town ensemble of violinists.

When Jews began to move to Israel in the 1970s, I didn't approve of this. I don't approve of it now either. Some time ago I lectured on the international situation at the plant. I was a member of the town party committee and this was my chore. I also prepared a lecture about Israel. The party organizer gave me literature that was not available in common libraries to prepare this lecture. From there I learned about Israel: this country is unable to take care of employment of its population, provide free education and medical care. When people have to pay for everything – such country cannot exist, it cannot develop. This is my personal point of view and it may be wrong, but my wife and I never even discussed emigration.

When Mikhail Gorbachev [33] initiated perestroika in the USSR, I was on his side at first. I liked it, when he said it was time to start telling people the truth. It's true, there have been too many lies, and the lower party staff was the source of these lies. I often spoke against lies. However, later, when I saw what direction this perestroika took, I understood that all these promises were just soap bubbles and that Gorbachev was an carpet bagger. However, I still kept hoping of some good to come, but later I gave up hopes. They say, perestroika gave us freedom of speech and press. This is not true. We had freedom of speech in the USSR before perestroika. Everything is based on interpretations. My grandson failed to enter a college in Voronezh, because of his Jewish identity. This is what his father thinks, but I think that he didn't have sufficient knowledge. And I am right. And I believe that the final step of perestroika – the breakup of the USSR was a crime, and this is what I think it to be. The USSR was a big and powerful country and today we have a number of smaller states that nobody in the world believes to be states. Only their presidents, who want to rule them need them, but nobody else. Nobody benefited from the breakup of the Union and nobody will. A state must be big, strong and rich and we had such state, but not any more. I believe this throws us decades back. In the USSR I, a son of a shoemaker, had the right for education and managed to implement it. And my children got a higher education, while now many talented children have no such opportunity since their parents cannot afford to pay for their children's education. This is not true that life was bad in the USSR. This whole propaganda yelling about the totalitarianism, fears of this time and arrests – I think it's a lie. They were minor and they were historically justified, but when the USSR collapsed, we lost it all.

They say the Jewish life has revived in the independent Ukraine. This is not true. Yes, a religious life has revived, but I don't know about the Jewish life. Yes, there are performances in Yiddish in theaters and there are newspapers in Yiddish, but who needs them? There are hardly any people, who can read in Yiddish, but cannot in Russian. The former USSR also published works by Jewish classics. Of course, there is a Jewish community now and I must admit people need it. The community provides assistance to old and ill people: they deliver food products and meals and fuel. Community members visit lonely and ill people asking them what they need and providing assistance. This is a very good and necessary cause.

As for religion, I believe religion must be strictly restricted in the country. Religion works for the good of people to some extent, but then religious officials, clergymen of all religions want to gain power at any cost makes religion unacceptable for me. Though I am an atheist, I cannot state that there is no God. It's not that I can prove that there is no God. I recently read about a flower. Its pistils and stamens are so deep inside that only one insect with a long proboscis can pollinate it.

They cannot exist without one another. This could not have developed in the course of evolution. This flower and insect must have appeared at the same time. One can feel the doing of some force, intellect. This speaks in favor of the God, but I would never believe that the God demanded glorifying Him all around. Such significant being needs not this petty glorification. The religion itself teaches good things and I am loyal to religion as long as they don't use it as means for reaching a goal. However, I have a hostile attitude to any clergymen of any religion, with no exceptions. I respect deeply religious people, who try to live as God tells them – they are honest people, but I do not accept professional clergymen. One must not earn his butter on ideas. Ideas must rule a man and they must propagate them, but not for money, but for their convictions.

Glossary:

[1] 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.

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

[3] 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.

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

[5] 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.

[6] Bessarabia: Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

[7] 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.

[8] Petliura, Simon (1879-1926): Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

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

[11] 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.

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

[13] 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'.

[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] Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969): Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

[16] 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.

[17] Enemy of the people: Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

[18] Transnistria: Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

[19] Vlasov military: Members of the voluntary military formations of Russian former prisoners of war that fought on the German side during World War II. They were led by the former Soviet general, A. Vlasov, hence their name.

[20] Judenrat: Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work,

education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

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

[23] 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'.

[24] Erenburg, Ilya Grigorievich (1891-1967): Famous Russian Jewish novelist, poet and journalist who spent his early years in France. His first important novel, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurento* (1922) is a satire on modern European civilization. His other novels include *The Thaw* (1955), a forthright piece about Stalin's régime which gave its name to the period of relaxation of censorship after Stalin's death.

[25] 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.

[26] 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.

[27] Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union: Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

[28] 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.

[29] 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.

[30] 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.

[31] Young Octobrist: In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

[32] 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.

[33] 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.