

# Leo Lubich

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Lvov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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*Leo Lubich is an elderly man with bright eyes and a cheerful smile. He met me at the front door of his tidy and cozy apartment in an old building in Lvov. He was wearing a snow-white starched shirt and a bowtie. Lubich lives with his beloved wife Rosa. Lubich was enthusiastic about talking about his life. He mentioned at the beginning, though, that he was 90 years of age and struggles to remember things, and that he might be confused, but that he was eager to share the story of his family with us. He interlaced his story with jokes and, after our conversation, he told me to sit down at the table and he began to show me tricks, all the while closely watching my reaction. I applauded vigorously, laughed, and Leo Lubich was left beaming with joy.*



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### **Family Background**

My parents - Pinkhus and Malka Lubich - were born in the 1880s in a small town in the Zhytomir region. I don't remember where they came from. I am over 90 years of age and have forgotten many things. The name of my grandfather on my father's side was Movshe. As for my grandmother on my father's side, I don't know her name. The name of my grandfather on my mother's side was Leiba Gandlin. When I was born, only grandmother Khava was still alive. My grandmother Khava had no education. She was a housewife and raised children. The way I remember it, she was very old when I was growing up, or else she probably just seemed old to me. I remember her sitting in the yard playing with the children. My grandmother was deeply religious. She was too old to go to synagogue, but she prayed at home every day. She observed all the Jewish traditions and fasted at Yom Kippur. She died during the Civil War [1](#) around 1918.

Both my father and mother had brothers and sisters. Of all of them, I only knew my father's brother Boris. Uncle Boris took part in the revolution of 1917 [2](#), the Civil War, and after the war he became an NKVD official [3](#). From the middle of the 1930s he was Deputy Minister of the NKVD of Udmurt Republic. He lived in the town of Izhevsk in the Urals. His wife Lena was Russian. Of course, Boris didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Basically, before the Great Patriotic War [4](#) he stayed out of touch with his Jewish relatives.

My parents grew up in religious families where all the Jewish traditions were observed. I don't know how they met. My parents got married in 1908. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at the synagogue. After the wedding my parents moved to Kiev.

My father was a tailor apprentice in Kiev and in due time started his own business. My father had a traditional Jewish education. He studied in cheder and after finishing it he began to study a tailor's profession in his hometown. My mother learned to stuff cigarettes and sold them in bulk. But her main occupation was housekeeping and raising children, of course.

There were four children in the family: my older sister Maria, born in 1910, myself, born in 1912, and our brothers: Jacob, born in 1915, and Aron, born in 1919.

After finishing secondary school Maria worked as a cashier at the cinema theater. Her husband Alexandr Rapoport was a shop superintendent at the shoe factory. Alexandr was a member of the Communist Party. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War the regional Party committee sent him to the village in the Kiev region where he had grown up. The Party assigned him to become a partisan. His parents and brother Motia stayed in the village during the war. They were shot by fascists and Alexandr perished in his partisan unit. Maria and her son David - along with myself, Jacob, and our parents - spent the war in evacuation in Izhevsk. Maria didn't remarry. After the war she lived with her son and his family in Kiev. She did not work and took care of her son's home. She died in Kiev in 1960. David and his family live in Kiev. David worked as a foreman at the plant throughout his whole life. Now he is a pensioner. His sons are engineers, they are married and have children.

After finishing lower secondary school, Jacob finished a degree at construction college. He went to work as a builder in Belaya Tserkov, a small town 150 km from Kiev where he met a lovely Jewish girl named Polia and married her in the late 1930s. He and his wife visited us in Kiev several times before the war. Polia was a doctor and when the Great Patriotic War began she was recruited to the army. Jacob was not subject to recruitment since he worked at a military construction department. He went to Izhevsk where he was assigned to work on the construction of a new plant with his daughter Nelia, born in the late 1930s. He took his family with him: his parents, Maria and her son, and me. His wife Polia perished at the front. Her parents and all her other relatives were shot in Belaya Tserkov, along with all the other Jews that stayed in town during the war. Jacob didn't remarry - he raised his daughter by himself. He became a highly skilled construction worker and published several books. He and Nelia live in Kiev. Nelia has no children; she never managed to get her personal life in order. She worked as an accountant in various offices. She only calls me on my birthday.

My younger brother Aron, after finishing lower secondary school, was doing his compulsory service in the army when the Great Patriotic War began. Aron was sent to the frontlines right away. We had no information about him during the war and thought he had perished, but after the war he

sent us a note and in 1946 he demobilized and came home. He managed to escape encirclement in Belarus. He joined a partisan group where he fought until his unit reunited with Soviet troops in 1944. Aron continued his service in the Red Army and finished the war in Berlin. Later he was commandant of a German town. Aron got married after he returned to Kiev. He, his wife Riva, and their daughters live in Israel now. They moved in the late 1980s. They call me occasionally, but I don't remember the name of the town where they live.

## Growing Up

I remember our house and our street well. We lived in a five-story apartment house, number 9, Andreevskiy Spusk Street. [Andreevskiy Spusk is a steep hill connecting the historical center of Kiev with Podol. This street is a historic monument that is preserved by the state.] This apartment building is still there. On the top of the hill there is the beautiful turquoise and white St. Andrew's Church built by the architect Rastrelli. [5](#) I used to catch a glimpse of the church every time I came out of the building. The street was cobblestone and the sound of horseshoe clattering could be heard well. There were many Jewish families living in our building; the area was mainly inhabited by Jews. I remember the family of the cabinetmaker Presman. He had many children and we played ball with them under a big poplar tree in our yard. There was a signboard which read "Tailor Lubich" hanging on our building. It also said "Entrance from the backyard" in smaller letters. We lived in a big four-room apartment in the basement. The apartment was nicely furnished and there were beautiful velvet curtains on the windows. We had carpets on the floors and nice china. There was electricity in the house, but no gas. There was a big stove used for cooking and heating the apartment. Later we got a kerosene heater and Primus portable stoves. We were a wealthy family, but there were no maids. There was one dark room without windows where we children slept. There was a big dining room, our parents' bedroom, and another room with big mirrors and a cutting table where my father worked.

My father had two assistants to put fabrics that my father was cutting together. My father was a highly skilled master artisan: he received orders and cut fabrics. His assistants' names were Mayorov, a Russian, and Vassilkoskiy, a Jew. I remember them so well since they were Bolsheviks and were involved in spreading revolutionary propaganda. My father sympathized with the revolutionary cause and helped them; I remember him hiding piles of the flyers brought by Mayorov and Vassilkovski in the storeroom. My mother wasn't happy about his getting involved and used to warn him in a whisper that the whole family might suffer or be killed.

I remember the horseshoe clatter and the yelling and singing of the Petliura [6](#) units that entered the town in 1917. There were other troops in town: the Reds [7](#) and the Whites [8](#). The power switched from one side to the other throughout the course of a single day, but I only remember the reckless, drunk Petliura soldiers. A day before the Petliura units came to the city, my father's employees Mayorov and Vassilkovski left town. They dropped by our apartment to say goodbye to my father and to tell us that the Bolsheviks would achieve victory and return. In the morning, the Petliura soldiers spotted the cannon in the square in front of our house and began to fire at our building. All the Jews were hiding in their apartments and nobody dared to go outside. Petliura soldiers found our building's janitor and forced him to show them the apartments occupied by Jews. They forced Jews to come out into the yard and shot them under the poplar tree. Many of my friends, along with the Pressman family and their numerous children, were killed. Our family was lucky; we were wealthy and paid a ransom - the soldiers took our carpets, china, cuts of expensive

fabrics and bronze statues, and left us alone. Petliura had his apartment and headquarters on the fifth floor of our house, but I never saw him. On the following day, Petliura's order came down to take my father upstairs to his apartment. My mother was desperate - she fell on her knees wailing, she thought that Petliura had found out about my father's Bolshevik friends. She didn't believe we would see him again, but he returned after some time and told us that Petliura had heard that he was a great tailor and ordered a military jacket from him. When my father complained that Petliura's soldiers had taken away our belongings, he told my father to go to an officer and tell him that Petliura ordered our belongings returned. My mother and father had a discussion and decided to leave it alone. They decided they could forget about all the things they had earned and collected, since they were happy that we were all alive. Fortunately, my father didn't ask for his property back, for who knows what would have happened if he had. I don't remember whether my father had enough time to make a jacket for Petliura since the Red units came back soon after. My father's assistants Mayorov and Vassilkovskiy returned, too. At the end of 1918, Soviet power was established in Kiev. The Civil War was over and NEP began [9](#).

My father continued to work. Mayorov and Vassilkovskiy didn't work for him any longer, though they came to see him every now and then. My father had other assistants: a vest-maker and trouser-maker that worked from home. We children used to take fabric cuts to them and pick up the finished clothes. One representative of the district trade union committee came to see my father. They demanded that my father stop exploiting workers, enter into an agreement with them, and pay some membership fees. My father refused and, as a result, his business was boycotted. Workers would stand in the yard and at the front door of our building. They didn't let my father's clients in and didn't let my father go to his assistants. My father signed some papers for the trade union activists and continued to work. His assistants were gone, though. My mother became his assistant. My father had a license and paid taxes. He was not afraid of the auditors that visited him every now and then. They didn't bother my father because he had an influential clientele; he made clothes for many officials and, I believe, they ordered the auditors to leave my father alone.

My father continued to do a good job of providing for the family after the revolution of 1917. We didn't starve in the 1920s, nor in 1932-33 during the periods of famine [10](#). My father had money and my mother had the jewelry that she used to take to Torgsin [11](#) and exchange for food whenever we needed it. Torgsin stores were opened in Kiev in the early 1930s.

Our family observed Jewish traditions. We didn't eat pork and followed kosher rules at home. I can't remember any details about the Saturday celebrations, but I do remember that my father never worked on Saturdays. My mother lit candles and prayed over them on Friday and we had a festive dinner. The food on Saturday was made a day before and was left in the oven to stay warm. But my parents weren't truly religious. They never prayed, but my father had a tallit, tefillin, and religious books in Hebrew - there were no other books at home. He had a seat at the synagogue at the bottom of Andreevskiy Spusk. He went there on Saturdays and on holidays with his tallit and tefillin on. The synagogue was not too big, but it was nice inside: it had velvet chairs and a stand for the rabbi.

I remember how our family celebrated Pesach. The apartment was cleaned thoroughly in advance. All the dust and dirt was swept away, the mattresses and carpets were cleaned, and the Pesach china and dishes were washed. My mother took out the special kosher dishes and utensils from an old box in the storeroom. There were silver wine sets and china and crystal dishes. My father

brought home matzah from the synagogue. A few days before the holiday, my father took some poultry to the shochet. There was plenty of food made for Pesach: gefilte fish, pancakes, dishes made with matzah, chicken broth, fried chicken, stewed meat, and liver pastes. My father, wearing his tallit and tefillin, conducted the seder while leaning on pillows at the head of the table. One of my brothers – the younger one, Aron – went outside and father would hide a piece of matzah under a pillow. Aron came back and searched for the matzah. When he found it, he asked four traditional questions and our father gave answers. This was an annual ritual that we children enjoyed so very much. I have only dim memories of the other holidays. I only remember that my mother made delicious food and we sat together at the table.

When I turned five or six years old my father invited a Jewish teacher, a melammed, to teach me at home. He was an old Jew who wore a big black hat and payes [sidelocks]. He came from another end of Podol. He liked going by tram and used to take a longer ride and come back on foot. Our neighbors' boys joined me and it was like a cheder school. We studied Hebrew and read Torah. I studied with him for about half a year. My parents spoke Russian and didn't think that Yiddish had any future or that we might need it.

At seven years of age I went to the same Russian school where my older sister Maria studied. My father sent me to the nearest school in our neighborhood. In two or three years this school was turned into a Jewish school. I don't know why it happened, but everything stayed the same anyway. Only the language of teaching changed. In the late 1930s it became Russian. There were Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish children in our school. We got along very well and never had any conflicts associated with nationality. We played sports together after school. When we became pioneers we began to attend clubs in the House of Pioneers. I attended a drama club where we studied recitation – we even put on a performance there. There were also sport, dancing, and technical clubs.

My father arranged a bar mitzvah for me in 1925. At this point, the synagogues still functioned and the authorities hadn't yet begun trying to stamp out religion. This struggle began in earnest in the 1930s [12](#). During my bar mitzvah I had a tallit put on, and tefillin placed on my hand and head, and I was taken to the synagogue. There I met the rabbi and he conducted the ritual. I don't remember the ritual itself since I saw it as a game, but didn't dare disobey my father by refusing to take part. The adults explained to me that I had come of age and could now come and pray at the synagogue. In reality, I stopped going to the synagogue since I was more taken by the communist ideology we learned at school and didn't believe in God. I believed religion to be an ignorant vestige of the past.

## **Early Adulthood**

After finishing lower secondary school I went to work. Besides having to support my parents, I wanted to have my own money to go to the cinema or buy sweets. But the unemployment rate was high at that point and it was hard to get a job. Beyond that, my father was an entrepreneur and it was only the children of workers and peasants that were given priority in terms of employment. I went to the "Assistance" employment agency in Podol. They helped me get a job as a weaver at the weaving mill. After working for two or three years I decided to continue my education. I had an agreement with another weaver that he would work the first shift from 8 am until 3 pm so that I could take the second shift and study at the rabfak [13](#) on Bolshaya Vassilkovskaya Street. Only the



children of workers and peasants had a right to study there, but I had been given the status of worker by that time, having worked at the mill for a few years. I walked to the rabfak school located quite a distance from my home and after school I went to work. I studied well and was elected monitor of the group. I joined the Komsomol [14](#) and took part in various activities with them. We went to parades on 1 May and on October Revolution Day [15](#) and joined sports teams. At that time, young people had to accomplish sporting requirements to receive BGTO and GTO badges ["Be ready for labor and defense" and "Ready for labor and defense"]. I met all the requirements and was proud to receive a GTO badge - I wore it on the lapel of my jacket.

In the summer of 1933 I was invited to the military registry office where they notified me that after finishing the rabfak school I was to go serve in the army. At the rabfak school's prom, the rector of the Textile Institute told me, "Lubich, you are a good student and you need to continue your education." He offered to let me enter their Institute and get a release from service in the army. Although I wanted to continue my studies, I was patriotic and believed it would be indecent for a Soviet Komsomol member to avoid serving in the army. But when my parents heard about the doubts I was having, they told me that as the oldest son it was my job to get an education and support my family. So, I decided to go study. By that time I was no longer religious.

I entered the Textile Institute. In 1934 the government of Ukraine moved from Kharkov to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, and with that a few of the less popular educational institutions (including mine) relocated to Kharkov. I lived in a hostel in Kharkov for a year. I was a good student, but I had some bad influences and started playing cards. We gambled every night and then had to pay back our debts when we lost. I began to work as a janitor and a laborer at the freight railway station. When my parents found out they insisted that I move home. I moved to Kiev after finishing my first year at the Textile Institute in Kharkov. In 1935 I got a transfer to the Faculty of Economics at the Kiev Institute of the Leather and Shoe Industry.

I was a sociable guy, enjoyed jokes and tricks and performed tricks at concerts at the Institute during Soviet holidays. In 1936, during the period of repression, arrests began in the country [16](#). At first they arrested the Party and state officials, but then common people began to be arrested. There were portraits of Party leaders hanging in the concert hall of our Institute and we often saw some of them disappear. This meant that this person had been arrested. Some of our lecturers and students were arrested. I got very scared. Some time before I had corresponded with an American company that had published a manual for employees in the industry in which I planned to work. I wrote them that I was the owner of a few factories and plants and that I needed their assistance. I eventually received a parcel from the U.S. with the book *Assistance for Workers*. Every day when I left for the Institute I said a mental goodbye to my family. I was afraid of being arrested for having this relationship with foreigners, but fortunately, I wasn't.

My father continued to work at home, but, like me, he was afraid of being arrested for owning a private business and for having had employees. The prayer house located nearby was closed. My father went to the only functioning synagogue in Kiev on big holidays. We continued to celebrate Jewish holidays at home, but we did it quietly and without guests.

## **During the War**

Upon graduation from the Institute I worked at the shoe factory in Podol for two years. I later got a job at the military construction department where my brother Jacob worked. He was an economist

there. In spring 1941, I met Rosa Finkler - a nice Jewish girl - at the canteen. Rosa was from Odessa. She was two years younger than I. She had graduated from the Odessa Food Industry Institute and often traveled to the grain elevator in Kiev. Rosa was an only child. Her parents lived in Odessa. They were clerks at an agricultural office. They didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Rosa and I took walks in the parks on the bank of the Dnieper River, went to theaters, the philharmonic, and the circus. I am a cheerful man and an optimist - I always looking at the bright side. Maybe it was this optimism that made the arrival of the war on 22 June 1941 such a complete surprise for me. Jacob and I, as well as all our colleagues, got a release from the army service. Uncle Boris, my father's brother who lived in Izhevsk, called us in Kiev right after the war began. My mother wrote letters to my uncle before the war and he wrote back, but I had never seen him before. He invited us to come to Izhevsk. But my parents refused to leave Kiev. They remembered World War I and said that Germans were civilized, cultured people and would not do any harm to Jewish people. While they considered the option, I left for Izhevsk by myself. I didn't even have the opportunity to say goodbye to Rosa.

My trip lasted for almost three weeks. The train was stuffed with people going into evacuation. The train was delayed for long periods at a time, at each stop we would have to let the military trains pass by. There was not enough food, but I took it easy: I was happy to get boiled water or a bowl of soup. The train stopped at the Sarapul town of Udmurtia - 2000 km east of Kiev. We were told to get off the train since it was going to become a military train for frontline use. By that time I had run out of money and had to stay at the railway station, sleeping on my bag at night, for a few days. I called my uncle Boris from a phone at the station. He told me to go to the NKVD manager, his acquaintance Snegiryov, in Sarapul [17](#). Snegiryov lived in a private house surrounded by a high fence. There was a guard with a dog that let me in when he heard who I was. The manager of the NKVD welcomed me and treated me to a nice hot lunch. When he saw how hungry I was he told me to come to him with any problem - even if I just got very hungry. I asked him whether he could help me get a job. Snegiryov made a phone call and sent me to a plant.

It was a defense plant that had been evacuated from the town of Ramenskoye in the Moscow region. The plant manufactured equipment for planes. I was appointed deputy shop superintendent. I joined the Communist Party at this plant. Anybody could easily join the Party at that time, they submitted an application and received their membership card within a matter of days without any ceremony. I knew that one had to be a member of the Party to make a career. We worked under great pressure. New facilities for the plant were built right over our heads. We received a little bread by way of coupons. Workers' families were starving. I remember people calling to me when they saw me in the shop, "Lubich, we would rather go to the front. We would rather die than see our children starve to death." What could I do to help them? I was starving too.

There was insufficient power due to the low capacity of the power plant in Sarapul. In December 1941 we received an important task from the government to manufacture blind navigation equipment. Due to a lack of power supply and equipment operation downtime, the plant manufactured 20-30 units instead of 100. A week or two after we began manufacturing these units, Kabanov, the Minister of Aviation, and one of his deputies, Haimovich, a Jewish man, arrived at the plant. At night the Party and logistics management of the plant had a meeting in one of the shops. It was dark in the shop. There was only light over the table where the Presidium was sitting: Kabanov, Haimovich, the director of the plant and the shop superintendents. Kabanov put a gun on

the table and said "If you do not manufacture 100 units per day from tomorrow on, I will shoot the director of the plant and his deputy." When I came to work at night I saw all the equipment in operation: at the direction of Kremlin trains, mobile power plants began arriving at night. Workers were given additional food and they stopped thinking about going to the front. The plant began to work at its full capacity. Kabanov left for Moscow, but his deputy Haimovich stayed longer. There was no anti-Semitism and all our efforts were directed at achieving victory over the fascists.

During the spring something happened that made me turn to Snegiryov again. There were militia and military officers patrolling in public areas - like cinema theaters, the market, or parks. They captured young men and took them to the military registry office. There were raids to capture all those that avoided mobilization. I got caught up in one such raid. I explained to the registry office that I was released from service in the army, but they didn't listen to me until I asked them to call Snegiryov. The officer on duty apologized and let me go after he received direction from Snegiryov. I worked in Sarapul for almost a year.

In August 1941 my parents, sister Maria and her son David, and my brother Jacob and his daughter Nelia went to Izhevsk. I wanted to join them, but the plant management didn't let me quit. My parents asked for uncle Boris's involvement and he arranged a transfer for me to a plant in Izhevsk.

In Izhevsk my parents, my sister and brother stayed in a big four-room apartment in the center of the town that uncle Boris arranged for them. He also helped my father get a good job: Director of the Special Military Trade Agency. My father had tailor, shoe, and hosiery shops under his guise. My father got a good salary and received special food packages. As a result, we didn't starve like many others in evacuation.

At the beginning of 1943 I received a letter from Rosa Finkler. She got uncle Boris's address from my parents at the beginning of the war. Rosa and her parents were in the town of Kamyshov in the Sverdlovsk region, which was not that far from us - about 900 km from Izhevsk. I took a leave from work to visit Rosa. It was a harsh winter. Rosa met me at the station. We exchanged kisses and went to the town on the sleigh that she had arrived on. I realized then that I loved her more than anybody in the world. I was amazed by how thoughtless it had been to leave home without saying goodbye to Rosa, but there was an easy explanation: I matured throughout the war. I stayed in Kamyshov for a week, met with Rosa's parents, and proposed to her. My return trip was very hard. There were tons of military trains traveling eastward and it was difficult for civilians to travel. I waited until a conductor turned away and jumped into an overhead compartment. When soldiers entered the railcar, they saw me and began screaming "Spy, spy" and tried to push me out of the railcar. I grabbed the edge of the berth and managed to explain to them that I was no spy, just an engineer coming from a visit with his fiancée. They left me alone and I entertained them with jokes and tricks on the way back. By the time we reached Izhevsk, we had become the best of friends and they were reluctant to part with me. I'd guess that many of them perished during the war.

Within a month, Rosa and her parents arrived at Izhevsk. We got married at the registration office. Rosa decided to keep her maiden name. She went to work at the plant. Her parents moved in with my parents and we got a room in a private four-room house from the plant: we occupied one room. There was a plot of land near the house, and our landlords allowed us to use a small portion as a kitchen garden. Rosa and I grew vegetables: potatoes, beetroots - they were a great help.



## After the War

I have bright memories of Victory Day on 9 May 1945. We were at the plant. Employees – men and women – exchanged kisses and hugs. Women whose husbands, sons, and brothers had perished at the front were crying. We marched in the town – all of us were overwhelmed with joy. My mother was crying – we still hadn't heard from Aron and she thought he had perished.

In few months, the plant began to prepare for reevacuation. I didn't want to go back to Kiev since Rosa and I didn't have a place to live there. We were offered a choice between Riga and Lvov as there were vacant apartments in those towns. These towns joined the USSR in 1939 [18](#) and a part of the Polish population had left the country, unwilling to reside in the USSR. There were also vacant apartments that belonged to Jewish families that had perished during the war.

My parents, Maria, Jacob and their children left for Kiev. Rosa and I went to start a new life in Lvov. We traveled via Moscow in September 1945 after the victory over Japan [19](#). We went to the Red Square where we mingled with a crowd of happy Moscovites. We saw fireworks. In Lvov we met the director of the machine unit plant, Litinetskiy. We were to work at this plant. We received a room that formerly belonged to a Polish family that had left Poland after the war. There was a Polish tenant in another room. He was also going to leave. We invited Rosa's parents from Izhevsk and decided to stay. We lived in one room with my in-laws for many years until we got another room after our neighbor tenant died.

We didn't have children and that was all right with us. We could enjoy life and went to the theater or restaurant every week. We spent vacations at the seashore in the Crimea or Caucasus. We had enough money. Rosa worked as laboratory supervisor at the machine unit plant. I worked at a shoe shop and then got a job at the Progress Company [one of the best shoe factories in the USSR]. I was Human Resources Manager there. I never faced any anti-Semitism, even during those years when it became state policy – in the early 1950s [20](#). However, there was one incident during this period. One of the stores owned by the Progress Company, "Trud" [Labor], made footwear for work. The insoles were supposed to be made of leather and the sole had to be secured with special fixtures. Since it was hard to get the necessary materials, we obtained permission from management to make insoles from a different material - leather cloth - and to use wooden pins as fixtures. They made good shoes. But once I was called by an investigation officer that opened a case against me and few other managers. The charges against us were associated with the theft of materials that were in short supply. After our licenses and permits were received by Kiev the case was closed. But I never believed that this annoying incident had anything to do with anti-Semitism since other employees (of different nationalities) were also arrested. This happened in the early 1950s. I remember how Rosa and her parents sobbed. I remember how Stalin died in 1953. Rosa sobbed when she saw the monument to Stalin in the central park. I wasn't upset since I understood that there would be somebody else to replace him and life would go on.

My brother Aron came to Kiev at the end of 1945. He was encircled in Western Belarus at the beginning of the war. He wandered in the woods for several weeks hiding in a mud hut and eating berries and mushrooms. Once, during a raid, he had to dive into a swamp and breathe through a straw. Fortunately, Aron bumped into a group of partisans and joined their unit. He took part in reconnaissance and combat missions. When Soviet troops liberated Belarus in 1944, Aron joined them and reached Berlin. After the war Aron was over thirty years old. He didn't go back to school,

but got a job at a service agency. He was a watchmaker until he moved to Israel in the mid-1970s. Aron, Riva, and their two daughters live in Israel now.

My parents lived in their apartment with Maria and her son until they received their own in the 1960s. My father went to the synagogue in Podol after the war. My parents celebrated all the Jewish holidays like they had before the war. They were pensioners and helped Maria with the house. I visited them once in two or three years during my vacation. My father died in the early 1960s and my mother passed away in the 1970s when she was ninety years old. They were both buried in the Jewish section of the town cemetery - there were no Jewish customs followed.

As for uncle Boris, he lived in Izhevsk until someone who had been arrested during the the earlier period of repression, rehabilitated, and then released in the late 1950s, saw him on the street. This man blamed officials like my uncle for his suffering rather than blaming Stalin and the regime. He went to the town Party Committee and demanded that my uncle Boris be arrested. But the Secretary of the Committee had also been involved in carrying out arrests, and he managed to protect my uncle Boris. Boris and his wife left Udmutria promptly. They resided in the Far East for ten years. They didn't travel to the European part of the USSR out of fear of arrest. In the middle of the 1960s, my uncle Boris and his wife moved to the town of Volzhskiy on the lower Volga, 1000 km from Moscow, where my uncle died shortly thereafter. His wife stayed there. He didn't have any children.

I retired in the early 1980s. Rosa and I lived our life with ease and in love and peace. Many of our friends moved to Israel and invited us to join them, but we never even considered the idea. We love our Motherland, the country where we were born and where we lived our best years. We love Ukraine and its people. I have led an active life since I retired. I play sports and was a member of a jogging club for a number of years. Nowadays I write articles and poems that are published in the Jewish press and in the town newspaper of Lvov *Vysokiy Zamok* (High Castle).

Of course, perestroika had a disastrous impact on pensioners - we were deprived of our savings. We get miserable pensions. But, on the other hand, the arrival of Ukrainian independence in 1991 provided excellent conditions for the development and revival of Jewish life and culture. We often go to the Lvov Drama theater and get free tickets from the Jewish community. We watch performances of Russian and Ukrainian classics. We are active members of the Sholem Aleichem Association [21](#) where Rosa and I take part in parties and concerts. Rosa recites poems written by popular Soviet poets: Evgeni Evtushenko and others, and I perform tricks. Rosa also invites popular actors and producers to parties. We observe Jewish traditions: we buy matzah at Pesach and fast on Judgment Day. [Editor's note: this is the word he uses for Yom Kippur.] We try to lead a traditional Jewish life and follow all the rules - everything that we were not allowed to do during the Soviet regime. We are grateful to Hesed, a Jewish charitable organization that provides food and medication to old people. And they also offer support in the form of kindness. That said, I don't think of myself as an old man - not yet!

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Civil War**

By early 1918, a major civil war had broken out in Russia--only recently named the USSR--which is

commonly known as the civil war between the 'Reds' and the 'Whites'. The 'Reds' were the Bolshevik controlled Soviets. During this time the Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist party. The 'Whites' were mostly Russian army units from the world war who were led by anti-Bolshevik officers. They were also joined by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. During this civil war, the Bolsheviks signed a separate peace with Germany and finally ended Russia's involvement with the world war. 8 to 13 mln people perished in the war. Up to 2 mln. people moved to other countries. Damage constituted over 50 billion rubles in gold, production rate reduced to 4-20% compared with 1913.

## **2 In early October 1917, Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party to form an immediate insurrection against the Provisional Government**

The Bolshevik leaders felt it was of the utmost importance to act quickly while they had the momentum to do so. The armed workers known as Red Guards and the other revolutionary groups moved on the night of Nov. 6-7 under the orders of the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. These forces seized post and telegraph offices, electric works, railroad stations, and the state bank. Once the shot rang out from the Battleship Aurora, the thousands of people in the Red Guard stormed the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government had officially fallen to the Bolshevik regime. Once the word came to the rest of the people that the Winter Palace had been taken, people from all over rose and filled it. V. I. Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, announced his attempt to construct the socialist order in Russia. This new government made up of Soviets, and led by the Bolsheviks. By early November, there was little doubt that the proletariats backed the Bolshevik motto: 'All power to the soviets!'

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

### **4 22 June 1941 - memorable day for all Soviet people**

It was the first day of the great Patriotic War when the Germans crossed the border of their country bringing the war to its terrain. 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 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.

## **5 Bartolomeo Franchesko (Varfolomei Varfolomeevich) Rastrelli (1700-1771), architect**

Count, an Italian by birth. Born in Paris. Son of architect and sculptor Carl-Bartolomeo Rastrelli. Studied under his father. In 1716 came to St. Petersburg with his father, who had concluded an agreement with Emperor Petr I, and assisted him. Beginning in 1722 worked independently as an architect. When Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1741, he became her favorite court architect. He bore the rank of major general, the title of cavalier of the Order of St. Anne, and was an academician of architecture (1770). He had a number of students and followers. When Empress Catherine II ascended the throne in 1762 Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli went into temporary

retirement, in 1763 he was dismissed completely and left for Switzerland.

## **6 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.

## **7 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, fighting with a revolutionary fervor, distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23. This day became the "Day of the Soviet Army". On April 22 the Soviet government decreed compulsory military training for workers and peasants who did not employ hired labour. This was the beginning of the Red Army. Its founder was Leon Trotsky, with the title People's Commissar, which he lost in the power struggle against Stalin in 1924.

## **8 Soon after buying peace with Germany, the Soviet state found itself under attack from other quarters**

By the spring of 1918, elements dissatisfied with the radical policies of the communists (as the Bolsheviks started calling themselves) established centers of resistance in southern and Siberian Russia. Beginning in April 1918, anticommunist forces, called the Whites and often led by former officers of the tsarist army, began to clash with the Red Army, which Trotsky, named commissar of war in the Soviet government, organized to defend the new state. A civil war to determine the future of Russia had begun.

## **9 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 October Revolution and the Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **10 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. These shops were created in the 1920s to support commerce with foreigners. One could buy good quality food

products and clothing in exchange for gold and antiques in such shops.

### **11 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.

### **12 Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power**

### **13 Communist youth political organization created in 1918**

The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

### **14 October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia**

This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

### **15 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.

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

### **17 In 1940, the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) came under the rule of the neighboring Soviet Union (USSR)**

November 1 1939: The USSR Supreme Soviet passed the law on Western Ukraine's membership in



the USSR and inclusion in the Ukrainian SSR.

### **18 In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but WWII continued**

On the Far East Japan was fighting against the countries of anti-fascist coalition and China. Japanese army incurred great losses from the USA and Great Britain in 1943-44. However, Japan was still strong. The USSR declared a war to Japan on 8 August 1945 to put an end to the war. Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

### **19 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

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

### **20 Sholem Alechem, real name was Shalom Nohumovich Rabinovich (1859-1916)**

Jewish writer. He lived in Russia and moved to the US in 1914. He wrote about the life of Jews in Russia in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian.