

# Mark Golub

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[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[The war begins](#)

[Post-war](#)

[Married life](#)

[Glossary](#)

## My family background

My father's father Haim Golub was born in Lenino, Western Belorussia, in 1865. His family was involved in transportation, farming and in the timber felling business. My grandfather had a big family. My grandfather was recruited into the army and served at the town of Ladyzhin, Podolsk province. After his service term was over he married Esther Gerbinskaya. They married in the early 1890s. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and all the other rituals.

My grandfather owned a timber storage facility. I don't know how and when he purchased it, but he did well. He had the reputation of being a wealthy man in his town. He purchased timber and planks to sell to the villagers. It is my understanding that my grandfather was a timber specialist, but he was a poor businessman. I guess this was the role that my grandmother played, and later on my father took to it. Shortly before the revolution of 1917 my grandfather managed to win the wood cutting bid near Elsk in the vicinity of Gomel in Southern Belorussia. Jews were forbidden to participate in such bids, and a shtrohmann [a proxy] acted on behalf of my grandfather. My father went to Elsk to make all the necessary arrangements for wood cutting and sawing.

There were Jewish pogroms during the revolution and the Civil War [1918- 1921] in the town of Ladyzhin as well as in other Jewish towns. I don't know any details - my parents never told me about the pogroms. I only know that nobody in our family suffered from them.

My grandfather's relatives, except for his younger brother Yankel, lived in Poland, and there was no contact with them. Yankel, who was 15 years younger than my grandfather, emigrated to America in the 1900s. There he worked as a tailor and had his own business, but he went bankrupt. By the way, none of the Golubs was ever good at business, except my father. While Yankel was still doing well he came to Lenino in the 1920s and took to America all the relatives willing to join him. In the 1960s he came on a tour to Kiev. I spent a lot of time with him then. He told me a lot of interesting things about his life. He lived in New York alone. His wife either died or he divorced her, and he didn't have any children. His nephews visited him. He knew English well, socialized with his neighbors, read books and basically had a good time. He had a garden and a car. I don't remember when he died.

My father's mother, born in 1874, came from Podolia. I don't know anything about her parents. After my grandparents married, my grandmother stayed at home to raise the children. She was a housewife. My grandmother had a strong character and she kept house. My father told me that she was involved in charitable activities.

My grandparents spoke Yiddish between themselves and with the children. They were also fluent in Russian and could read and write in Russian as well, and also in Yiddish. My grandfather and grandmother were truly religious people. They had their own seats at the synagogue. They observed Jewish traditions and followed the laws of kashrut. They always celebrated Jewish holidays and the Sabbath, when grandmother lit candles, and grandfather read prayers, and afterwards, the whole family ate at the festive table. My grandmother cooked the most delicious traditional food I had ever tasted. At Pesach she made the most delicious sponge cakes from matzah flour, strudels with jam, raisins and nuts, gefilte fish, chicken broth with dumplings, and stuffed chicken necks. Even during the war when special festive dishes were out of the question, my grandmother and father's sister Riva used to clean the everyday dishes with sand and ashes as required by Jewish tradition at Pesach. My grandmother observed Jewish traditions after the war, too. She was the mistress of the house.

My grandmother had a younger brother and sister. Her sister, Genia Gerbinskaya, born in 1889, lived with her husband Yakov Schwartz in Kiev. They had a room in a communal apartment. Genia trained as a midwife, but she worked as a senior scrub nurse at the Kiev Military Hospital. Her husband was director of the pharmacy at this hospital. Before the revolution he owned a pharmacy in the town of Sobolevka not far from Ladyzhin. During the war we evacuated with them. Yakov Schwartz was responsible for the evacuation of the pharmacy. They evacuated to Tomsk. After the war they stayed there and worked at the military hospital. They were relatively wealthy. They both died in Tomsk before they turned 60. They had adopted a girl, Dora, from an orphanage in the 1930s.

I don't know when my grandmother's brother Hanaan was born. I didn't hear about him before the war, although his daughter Liza visited Kiev before the war. He was married, but I don't remember his wife's name. His daughter's married name was Meyersohn. They lived in Olgopol, in the Vinnitsa region, before the war. Hanaan was an accountant. After the war they lived in Odessa. In the late 1970s they moved to Israel and we didn't hear from them afterwards.

My grandparents had 4 children. The oldest, Yankel was born in 1893. He finished grammar school in Nikolaev. It was easier to enter this school there because it did not have a 5% quota [1](#) for Jewish applicants. After finishing grammar school he entered the Medical Faculty of Odessa University. He never graduated. I don't know why. He probably didn't care much about his studies. He returned to Ladyzhin and married the daughter of a rich merchant, a Jew who owned a store. They said that his wife Haika was a real beauty. She was a housewife and raised their daughter. During the time of the New Economic Policy [NEP] [2](#) he helped his father-in-law at the store and with purchases. He also established a Jewish operetta theater, which toured the neighboring villages. He played the parts of hero-lovers. In the middle or at the end of the 1920s, he moved to Kiev with his parents and got a job at the Vodotopstroy Company where my father was working. Yankel became a drilling foreman. When the war began he was in Schekino, in the Tula region. Later he went to Moscow and then to Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan, where his family evacuated. He stayed there and worked as a locksmith. At the end of 1944 Yankel and his family returned to Kiev. They lived in the kitchen of a

big communal apartment. They lived there for 30 years until they moved to Israel in the early 1970s. Yankel died in 1990 at the age of 97, being of clear mind and having an excellent memory. Although he was a worker, he was an intelligent man. He was a wonderful storyteller and always good company. After the war he went to Ladyzhin and wrote down the history of the extermination of the local Jews. Later he forwarded his notes to the Holocaust Institute in Jerusalem. Yankel's wife died in Israel before she turned 90. They strictly observed Jewish traditions in their family and followed the laws of kashrut. Yankel's daughter Liya Rubenstein, born in 1924, graduated from the Kiev Pedagogical Institute and worked as a tutor at a kindergarten. Her son Misha was born in the late 1940s. He lives in Israel; he is married and has two daughters. He works at a bank in the department providing services to foreign customers.

My father's younger brother Leonid was born in 1905. Before the revolution Leonid studied at cheder and at school. After the revolution he played in the orchestra of the military unit in Ladyzhin. When the time came for him to study at a higher educational institution Leonid couldn't go to study in Ukraine. He was a merchant's son and at that time the social status of parents was an important issue and the children of the proletariat had every priority to become students at higher educational institutions. He went to Nizhny Tagil where a relative of Yankel's wife was living and enrolled in the Metallurgical College. He never graduated; the management learned from what kind of family he came and expelled him. He returned to Kiev and went to work at the aviation plant. He is mentioned in the plant's history book as one of the team that made a speedboat.

In the 1940s Leonid graduated from Kiev Aviation Institute and got a job there. Before the war he was head of workshops at the Institute. During the war he kept his job at the Institute and was in Aktyubinsk, in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, and Charjou, Turkmenian Soviet Socialist Republic. During the battle of Stalingrad he was working on the repair of planes near Stalingrad. He was awarded the Defense of Stalingrad Medal. After he returned to Kiev he continued his work at the plant, received a license for flight engineering and was flying for some time while keeping his job at the Institute. In the late 1940s or early 1950s he completed an advanced course for engineers and received a diploma. He worked at the Institute until the last day of his life. In his last years he lectured on aircraft and engine maintenance. In the 1950s Leonid married Tsylya Shechtman, a Jew, born in 1915. She came from Tsybulevo where her father was a rabbi who, after the war was appointed rabbi in Kiev and worked there until he died in the 1960s. However, Leonid and Tsylya were atheists and didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Tsylya had many brothers whom I didn't know. Her sister Nyusia lived in Moscow. Tsylya was a widow when Leonid met her. Her husband had perished during the war and she had a son named Devik, born in 1936. She worked at the bank and was head of the operations department when they met. In the late 1940s all Jews were fired from banks and Tsylya found a job as a receptionist at a shoe repair shop. Leonid had a myocardial infarction in the 1950s that resulted in heart problems. He died in 1978 and was buried at Berkovtsy cemetery.

My father's younger sister Riva was born in 1907. After graduating from secondary school she enrolled in the Financial Faculty of the Kiev Institute of Public Economy and graduated in 1930. She met Pavlo Petrenko, a Ukrainian, at the Institute. He was a student in the Sugar Industry Faculty. They soon married. Upon graduation Pavel got a job at the sugar factory and Riva at the bank in Kharkov. My grandmother and grandfather didn't hear about their marriage. I don't think they would have accepted Riva's marriage to a man of a different faith. Other relatives knew about their

mixed marriage and accepted it. The times and attitudes had changed. As a party member, Pavel was sent to study at the Academy. He got a job assignment with the Pacific Navy. Riva followed him. She got a job at the bank and made a career there. She became Director of Fish Industry Crediting. After my father was arrested, Riva decided to visit him at the prison camp. It was a heroic decision that presented a risk to her career and even to her and Pavel's lives. However, everything turned out for the best. While she was away the bank management was arrested. Riva would have been arrested, too, if she hadn't stayed away from Vladivostok. She didn't return to Vladivostok. Pavel was transferred to the Chemical Weapons Department of the Naval Ministry in Moscow. He received a room at a communal apartment. Riva got a job at the bank. From the beginning of the war Pavel served at the Baltic Navy and Riva evacuated to Aktyubinsk in 1941. After the Aviation Institute evacuated to Charjou Riva got a job there as an accountant at the canteen. She returned to Moscow before the Institute was reevacuated. Pavel made a successful career and was promoted to rear admiral and head of the Navy Chemical Department. Riva died in 1997, a few years after Pavel. She was an imperious and capable woman. She was devoted to her family, helping and supporting her parents. In the last years of her parents' life she promised to visit them in Kiev each year and she kept her promise.

My father Grigory Golub was the middle son. He was born in Ladyzhin in 1895. My father read a lot when he was a child. He read with an oil lamp that affected his eyesight. He developed shortsightedness and wore glasses for the rest of his life. Father studied at cheder. He didn't get any special education. From an early age, my father helped my grandfather in his business. I know that he obtained all the necessary documents to move to Palestine in 1914, but he didn't leave because World War I began. During the war my father worked at a road construction site. He had a subcontract for road construction at the border with Romania. He hired workers and administered the work. My grandfather was also awarded a wood cutting contract in Belorussia and my father went there to make all the necessary arrangements.

In 1920 the Polish army occupied Ukraine and Belorussia, and the town of Elsk near Mozyr where my father was working was also under occupation. He moved to Lenino where grandfather's family was living. I don't know what my father was doing during this period. According to the peace agreement with Poland Lenino came under Polish rule and Ladyzhin remained in Russia. My father decided to return home and he had to cross the border in the vicinity of Slavuta illegally. In the mid-1920s he met Emmanuil Odelskiy, an engineer who owned a design office and designed sanitary engineering systems. My father learned this business from him and hired a crew to install these systems. The Vodotopstroy Company was established at this time, and my father became a supervisor in the sanitary engineering department. He did most of the work in Belorussia.

My mother Surah Golub [nee Lukasheskaya], was born in the town of Ladyzhin in 1905. At that time my mother's parents were renting an apartment from my father's parents. I don't remember my maternal grandfather Leib Lukasheskiy. He died in 1932. My grandfather was a cattle dealer. He was born somewhere near Uman in 1876, moved to Ladyzhin and then to Kiev. He was buried at an old Jewish cemetery in Kiev. After the cemetery was closed in the late 1950s my father moved my grandfather's ashes to the Berkovtsy cemetery. I don't know anything about my mother's life in Ladyzhin. She never told me anything and I never asked her any questions.

My grandmother Enia Lukasheskaya [nee Chernova], was born in Tsybulevo near Uman in 1880. Later she moved to Ladyzhin and then to Kiev. She didn't get any special education, but she liked

reading in Yiddish and Russian. She read a lot. She probably never went to work. My grandmother was an excellent housewife and a great cook. She was an easy-going woman. She never argued with her neighbors or family. During the war she lived with her daughter Ruzia. After the war she moved in with us and stayed with us until the end of her life. She raised my younger brother and me. She died in 1960. She felt ill during the last years of her life, but she never complained. She was buried beside my grandfather at Berkovtsy cemetery.

My grandparents were religious. All of their children received both a secular and a religious education. My grandmother and grandfather attended the synagogue and observed all the Jewish traditions. They spoke Yiddish in the family. Even after the war grandma kept the traditions.

I don't know how many brothers my grandfather and grandmother had. I knew one of my grandmother's brothers, and I heard about another one. My grandmother's older brother Isaak died in the early 1930s. I knew his daughter Shulamit Pekker. She was the same age as my mother and they were friends since childhood. She didn't work outside home until her husband died in 1945. After he died Shulamit got a job as a cashier at the pharmacy where she worked until she died in the 1970s. They had 3 children: Georgiy, born in 1926, Inna, born in 1937, and Mara. They all live in Israel now.

My grandmother's younger brother David Chernov lived in Kiev. Before the war he worked as logistics specialist at Vodotopstroy. He lived with his family in a one-story house and they had many neighbors. During the war they were in Almalyk near Tashkent. After the war they returned to Kiev, but they didn't get back their apartment. My father helped David to get employment at the sauna and laundry company. He worked in the logistics department. He also received a room at the company. I don't remember when he died. David's wife Leya was a housewife. I don't remember when she died, either. David had 3 children. The oldest, Efim, born in 1915, was a doctor. She is a pensioner now. The second son finished school in 1941 and was recruited into the army. He served in the unit defending Kiev and was encircled. He returned to his old apartment in Kiev and his neighbors reported him to the Germans. We don't know whether he perished at Babi Yar [3](#), or in the camp for prisoners-of-war. David's daughter Dora worked as an accountant. She married and had a son named Misha. She divorced her husband soon after their son was born. Dora and her son moved to Israel in the 1980s.

My mother's older brother Nuhim was born in 1901. In the early 1920s he moved to Germany where he had something to do with journalism. He married an Englishwoman in Germany. She was named Klara and was a Jew. She worked as a typist in Berlin. Before she married she was living with her mother and sister who owned a haberdashery store. In the 1930s during the period of persecution of Jews, Klara's sister and her mother left Germany for England. Klara corresponded with them before the war. Klara's daughter Ella was born in Berlin. At the end of 1936 the three of them moved to Kiev (Nuhim kept his Soviet citizenship). He became a worker at the foundry in Vodotopstroy and worked there until the war began. They were renting a room in Podol [4](#). After they arrived in Kiev, Klara worked as a typist at the Academy of Sciences. She typed in German, English and French. They were atheists like the majority of people. At the beginning of the war Nuhim joined the Territorial Army. That's all the information we had about him. He either perished at the front or at Babi Yar. Klara and Ella evacuated to Bashkiria with the Academy of Sciences. Klara fell ill there and died in 1942. Ella was sent to a children's home that moved to Moscow and we lost track of her. After the war my mother and grandmother took every effort to find her. They

found her in 1947 and she has lived with us ever since. Ella graduated from the Philology Department of Kiev University. She is a lecturer.

My mother's younger sister Ruzia was born in 1907. I don't know where she finished secondary school. In the mid-1930s she studied by correspondence at the Philology Department of Kharkov University and graduated from it. She became a Russian language and literature teacher. She married Alexandr Illin, a Russian, in the mid-1930s. Her parents didn't disapprove of their marriage. In the evacuation in Orsk, Ruzia was working as a locksmith at the military plant. After the war they moved to Moscow. She worked as an editor in the advertisement department. Ruzia had heart problems and she died in the mid-1960s. Her husband, engineer and lieutenant colonel Alexandr Illin, had died a few years before. They had two children. Their son Leonid, born in 1932, is an architect. He is married and has a daughter and a granddaughter. My aunt Riva looked after Ruzia's younger daughter Lidia, born in 1945, after her parents died. Lidia graduated from Moscow's Architectural Institute and moved to Israel in the early 1990s. She is married and has two children.

My mother's younger brother Efim emigrated to Argentina in the late 1920s after finishing school. He was a salesman in Buenos Aires. Some of grandmother's relatives lived there. My grandmother corresponded with Efim before the war. During the war they terminated their correspondence and failed to get in touch with one another after the war. My mother also had another brother named Motl. I only know that he drowned in the river in his infancy.

Both families were enthusiastic about the revolution, even though my grandfather Golub was a wealthy man and my mother's father Leib Lukashvskiy was rather well off. The Pale of Settlement was abolished immediately after the revolution and this gave people the hope that life would improve [5](#). The revolution was far away and life in Ladyzhin was quiet. My grandfather Golub still owned his storage facility. There were no arrests or expropriation of property in Ladyzhin. My grandfather was the owner of storage facilities until the end of the NEP in the early 1920s when the authorities took away his property. In 1924 my grandfather moved to Kiev and the family joined him in a short while.

My grandfather purchased a house in Bessarabka [downtown of Kiev]. He lived there with his son Yankel and Yasha's family. During the occupation this house was destroyed. Presently the Palace of Sports is located there. There were two parts in this house. There was a hallway with a big door to the kitchen which had a big stove in it. From the kitchen there was a door to my grandparents' bedroom and another door to Yankel's room. There was a big shed adjacent to this room. There was a kitchen garden in front of the house. My grandfather enjoyed working in the garden. My grandfather worked as a quality assurance specialist. He was responsible for the identification of defective beams, planks, etc. He worked there until the war began. He was almost 75.

My father's parents followed the laws of kashrut, always celebrated the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Grandmother always lit candles on Friday nights. Sabbath was observed according to custom - grandmother made gefilte fish and chicken broth. Lunch was served at 1 o'clock when everyone gathered at the table. My grandfather said the prayer and then they all had dinner and rested until the end of the day. They didn't clean the table until late in the evening. On Saturdays we could not light fires. On Chanukkah candles were lit by our father. We had a beautiful chanukkiyah, grandmother's dowry. The poor who did not own a chanukkiyah would cut a hole in

the center of a potato, fill it with oil and light a wick. These were not candleholders but small lanterns. On Chanukkah grandfather always gave me money. On Purim mother baked hamantashen, triangular tarts with poppy seeds and nuts. She also prepared - I cannot recall its Hebrew name - chicken broth with dumplings. Grandfather read the prayer.

My father knew my mother since her birth. My mother's parents were renting rooms from my father's parents, as I mentioned before. My father was 10 years older than my mother. After he turned 30, he decided it was time to get married. My father didn't go anywhere in search of a fiancée. He already had my mother in mind. She was a beautiful girl, they knew each other and they were good friends. My father came to Ladyzhin from Kiev and proposed to her. I don't know whether my mother was in love with him. She was 21 and realized that there were no prospects in Ladyzhin. She knew my father and he was a wealthy man. They married in Ladyzhin in 1926. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and a rabbi. The entire Jewish population of the town came to greet the bride and bridegroom. There were klezmer musicians, the guests feasted and danced, and had lots of fun. The wedding party lasted 3 days and then my father took his young wife to Kiev.

My father worked at Vodotopstroy after their wedding. My mother was a housewife. I was born in Kiev on 25th April 1928. I was given the name of Mordukh at birth. I have this name written in my documents. Our first apartment was near the Franko Theater. We had two rooms there. Three other neighbors lived in this communal apartment. One of our neighbors, a musician, played the violoncello with a jazz orchestra. This orchestra played at the Shantser Cinema in Kreschatik Street. [Kreschatik is the main street of Kiev.] Our neighbor's wife Vera and my mother were friends. Our second neighbor was Livshyts, a Jew. He was a popular tailor and worked at home. He had a wife and a daughter. I don't remember anything about the third neighbor.

In 1934-35 the capital of Ukraine moved from Kharkov to Kiev. The government and all its governmental institutions moved to Kiev. We received a room for a dwelling. There were 8 rooms in this apartment and 7 other families were our neighbors: they were the families of a dentist, a logistics specialist, a military man, a lawyer, an accountant, a chief accountant and the director of the plant. They were all Jews. There was also a huge kitchen, a hallway, two corridors, two toilets and a bathroom in this apartment. We got along well with our neighbors. It was a grand apartment for its time. We had a boiler facility in the yard that supported water heating. There was a beautiful stove in our room, but we didn't use it. We had a beautiful encrusted parquet floor. Mother cooked on the primus stove. There was running water, sewerage and even an intercom in the apartment. Pipes served as the intercom. They connected the entrance door with each apartment, and visitors could announce their arrival and the hosts would open the door for them. We also had an elevator in the building.

## Growing up

Our parents spoke Russian with the children and switched to Yiddish when they wanted to keep the subject to themselves. I didn't learn to speak Yiddish - nobody taught me. My mother could write in Yiddish. Before the war we had a complete set of the published works of Sholem Aleichem [6](#) in Yiddish that my parents were reading.

I don't remember the famine of 1932-33 [the infamous famine in Ukraine] [7](#). My father was working in Belorussia at that time. There was no famine there. He came to Kiev once a month bringing

some food. Besides, he was earning very well and my mother could afford to buy food at the highest price. So our family didn't starve.

I was supposed to go to school in 1935, but I wasn't admitted, because I hadn't yet reached the age of 8. The next year I was admitted to the 2nd grade of a Russian school. It was not far from our house. Before the war, there was a grammar school in this school. But there were too many schoolchildren and they had to study in 3 shifts. We had a good gym and a concert hall at school. It was a model school and all the children of the 'beau monde' studied there. In our school we had a teacher for each subject from the 3rd grade on, while in other schools there was one teacher per grade up to the fifth grade. I didn't do very well in school. I did better in language courses (Russian, Ukrainian and German) than in mathematics. After finishing the 4th grade we were transferred to another school - it still exists. There were many Jewish children in my class. The majority of the teachers were Jews, too. There was no anti-Semitism at that time. Of course, I knew that I was a Jew, but it never occurred to me that I might be different from the other pupils, or that this might be a cause for abuse. The word 'zhyd' [kike] was not in wide circulation back then. I became a Young Octobrist [8](#) at school and a pioneer when I was in the 4th grade. I wasn't actively involved in any activities, but I collected waste steel and waste paper with my classmates. Besides school, I attended the History Club at the Historical Museum and had a firm intention to become a historian in the future.

At school we attended parades on Soviet holidays. We also celebrated Soviet holidays at home - a holiday provided a good excuse to invite guests and have a party. We visited my grandparents (my father's parents) on all traditional Jewish holidays. The whole family gathered at their place. My grandmother cooked traditional food for every holiday. At Pesach we had chicken broth with dumplings made from matzah flour, chicken, gefilte fish, baked pudding from matzah and potatoes. There was always a lot of matzah in the house. My grandmother bought chickens and took them to the shochet in Bessarabka. She baked hamantashen for Purim. When I turned 5 my grandfather started taking me to the synagogue with him. It was called the Merchants' Synagogue. The people in the synagogue were all praying, but I didn't take much interest in what was going on.

We lived a wealthy life. We went to vacation resorts until 1935. In 1935 my father and Uncle Yankel received a big plot of land for a country house in Irpen, near Kiev. Before my father was arrested, he and my uncle managed to construct the foundation for a rather large apartment, but they only brought two smaller rooms to completion: one for us and another one for Uncle Yankel. The rest of the house was in the process of construction and was used as a shed. We went to rest in this country house every summer before the war.

My younger brother Lev was born on 23rd April 1937. Mother spent a lot of time taking care of him because he was very capricious and sickly. My grandmother Enia came to help my mother look after the baby. He wasn't circumcised, because at the time religious acts were persecuted by the authorities.

On 29th September 1937 my father was arrested. [Editor's note: This happened at the time of the so-called Great Terror.] [9](#) I remember the search that lasted a whole night. The policemen took father away in the morning. They also took my mother's younger brother's stamp album, books by Sholem Aleichem, and a book about the Belomorcanal. [This was one of the construction sites of the Stalinist epoch. Thousands of prisoners were involved in the construction of this canal.] They

made a list of all the valuables to be confiscated, if required, and left it with my mother. I became the son of an 'enemy of the people'. I can't say that the attitude towards me changed - I wasn't the first or the last in my class to have his father arrested.

In prison my father was accused of espionage for Poland. During the investigation my father confessed to crossing the border, but rejected the charge of espionage. In his file there is a report of his co-prisoner stating that my father made counterrevolutionary statements in the cell, was negative about the term of 25 years of imprisonment that had been introduced before, and told stories from ancient Jewish history. This was made a basis for the additional accusations of counterrevolutionary propaganda in the cell, and of preaching Zionism. In the verdict issued by a special meeting of the NKVD [10](#) representatives, he was accused of counterrevolutionary activities and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in a special prison camp. The verdict was issued on 2nd November 1937. One was not allowed to write letters to or visit the prisoners. One was only allowed to take parcels containing cigarettes and dried bread to the jail.

My father was sent to Ivdellag in the north of the Middle Ural. He became a head of the sanitary engineering department there. He was free to go to the neighboring village without any escort. My mother, Uncle Yankel and Aunt Riva visited him before the war. In February 1938 his management solicited for a 2-year reduction of his term in prison. My mother and father also sent requests to have his term reduced, but these were not successful. In 1944 there was an accidental explosion in the boiler facility of the camp. My father had nothing to do with it. It was the fault of the drunken operator, but my father was accused, and 5 years were added to his term of imprisonment. Later, my father managed to get released due to his poor health condition. He was allowed to live in Irpen - Kiev and other bigger cities were forbidden to ex-prisoners. The authorities decided on where the prisoners should reside after they were released from jail.

After my father was arrested my mother went to work as an accounting clerk at the distillery factory where she worked until the beginning of the war.

I was too small when Hitler came to power and don't remember anything about it. But when I was studying in school, I knew that fascism was the main enemy of the Soviet people. This was propagated in the mass media, in literature and at the cinema. I remember the film entitled *If There is a War Tomorrow*. My friends and I watched it several times and sang the song 'If there is a war tomorrow and we have to go, we need to get ready today'. This film was made in 1939 before the non-aggression pact with Germany was signed [The interviewee refers to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.] [11](#). This was a very characteristic film of that time. It described a war with Germany that would be over within 3 days. That was what we were convinced of. And that was why first days of the real war came as such a shock. We were prepared for a prompt victory. We were sure that if an enemy attacked us we would win victory within 3 days. We had military training at school. We went to a park where we dug trenches; the boys were snipers and the girls were medical nurses. We were trained to use gas masks and to shoot. There was a very serious militarization campaign going on. The Soviet- Finnish war [12](#) disillusioned us to some extent. It showed that our army wasn't quite as powerful as we had imagined, and that the war might not be as victorious as we were convinced it would be. Considering all the circumstances, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a surprise. It suddenly turned our enemies, the fascists, into friends and allies.

## The war begins

I remember very well the first day of the war, 22nd June 1941 [13](#). I had finished the 6th grade. It was Sunday and we were supposed to go to the country. At that time my father's sister Riva was staying at my grandmother's in Bessarabka in Kiev, and she was to join us for this trip. An alarm was given in the morning, but it didn't concern anybody. People thought it was part of the military training sessions that were conducted rather often. Riva was forced to hide in an entrance of a building on Kreschatik Street, Kiev's main street. She came to us around 10. We understood that the traffic wouldn't work until the alarm was over and that our trip was to be delayed. Then our neighbor told us that a woman in Kreschatik said that the aviation plant in Sviatoshyno was bombed. Then the planes came flying and guns shooting at them. People were used to it, because such trainings were quite often. Molotov [14](#) spoke at noon announcing the beginning of the war with Germany. The first thing I saw when I went onto the balcony were lines of people at the stores buying up everything they could.

The distillery where my mother was working was not evacuating, and it was difficult to go on one's own because of the panic and the crowds of people at the stations. Therefore, it was decided that my mother, Riva, Lev and I would go to Kharkov with the employees of Kiev's Military Hospital as my grandmother's sister Genia and her husband Yakov Schwartz' relatives. We went by boat at the beginning of July. My mother and Riva decided that we would get off in Kremenchug, a place not too far from Kharkov. I remember this trip. We had a lot of luggage. We reached Kobeliaki Station by train and took another train to Poltava. It was a real gypsy camp near the Poltava Station. There were thousands of evacuated people. It was next to impossible to get on the train. At night we were in a bombing, but we escaped all right. Riva found a car and arranged for the driver to take us to Kharkov. Riva left for Moscow from Kharkov. We went to my mother's sister Ruzia. In her two-room apartment there was Ruzia, her husband, their son, my grandmother, my mother, my brother and I, the mother of Ruzia's husband, his sister and her son, his brother's wife and their two children. There were 13 of us in all.

We stayed there until the middle of September when the evacuation from Kharkov began. We were thinking again about how to leave. Ruzia's husband Alexandr was working at a design institute and was supposed to leave for Stalinsk in the Kemerovo region or to Orsk, in the Chkalov region where they had their offices. He was only allowed to take my grandmother Enia and my brother Lev with them. My mother and I left with the Kiev Military Hospital, with which we were listed as members of Yakov Schwartz' family. Our trip across the country lasted almost a month, until we reached Tomsk. We found an apartment in Tomsk and my mother started looking for information about Ruzia's family. We found out that they were in Orsk. At the beginning of November Yakov bought us tickets to Orsk and my mother and I went on this trip. We heard about Babi Yar for the first time on this train. There was an article in the newspapers stating that thousands of Jews had been shot in Kiev. We moved into the room where Ruzia was living with her family in Orsk. There were 7 people in this 15 square-meter room that they rented on the outskirts of Orsk. After a short time Alexandr received an apartment in Orsk. They moved out, leaving my mother, my grandmother, Lev and me in this room.

The center of Orsk was located near a mountain with ruins of an ancient fortress. The town was situated on the left bank of the Ural River. A flood was expected in the autumn of 1942, but our landlord tried to convince us that we were at no risk in this house. But we did have concerns and

moved to Ruzia's apartment. In the middle of April, downstream from the place where the Or river flows into the Ural an ice blockage resulted in the biggest flood people could remember. The whole town except for the part near the mountain was flooded. There were victims but nobody mentioned any numbers. Up to 50 people came to Ruzia's 3-room apartment. After the flood we stayed in this apartment. We could hardly make ends meet. The salary was too small to buy anything. We exchanged clothes for food. I worked a week at the collective farm picking potatoes. Every 10th bucket was ours and I earned potatoes for the winter. At the beginning of 1943 Alexandr was transferred to another job and Enia left with him.

I finished the 7th grade of school in Orsk. There were many evacuated children at school. There were many Jews among the schoolchildren and teachers. There were no expressions of anti-Semitism.

My father's parents, his brother Leonid and sister Riva were in evacuation in Charjou, Turkmenistan. When the war began my grandfather didn't want to be evacuated. He said that he had known Germans in 1918 and there was no reason to fear them. But the family forced him to leave. They evacuated with the Kiev Aviation Institute. They lived in a small room on the grounds of the Institute. My mother wrote to Riva and we decided that we would leave Orsk for Charjou to join them. We arrived at Charjou at the end of May or beginning of June 1943. My grandfather worked in his kitchen garden, but he wasn't a big success. My mother worked as a waitress at the canteen for cadets and Lev went to kindergarten. I studied with the 9th grade class at school.

In May 1944 we returned to Kiev by freight train. In Kiev we got a temporary dwelling at the hostel of the Institute. My father had been released from the camp by then and he found us on the following day after we arrived in Kiev. After a few days he got a job in the Sanitary Engineering Department at Gorkommunistroy. He worked there until he retired. My mother was an accountant at the Aviation Institute until she retired in 1960. My father bought an apartment in a one-story building across the street from the Aviation Institute where Leonid and my mother were working. There was one room and a kitchen in this apartment. My father refurbished this apartment, turning the kitchen into a room. My grandmother, grandfather and Leonid moved into this room, and my father, my mother, Lev and I lived in the other room. My father installed water piping and a gas stove in the hallway between the two rooms. There was a small plot of land near the house and my grandfather turned it into a kitchen garden. He was 80 years old, but he went to work as a janitor in Sviatoshyno. After a few days he got into a near-miss car accident and his sons forbade him to work, so he worked in the kitchen garden, read the Bible, prayed and helped my grandmother with the housework. My grandmother died in July 1953 and was buried in the Jewish section of Kureniovka cemetery. In the early 1950s my grandfather got an endoblast and had to have his leg amputated. The surgery was not successful and he lived with anesthetics. He died in May 1954 and was buried in the same grave as my grandmother.

## Post-war

Lev went to school. I also had to continue my studies. I didn't want to go to the 10th grade, because I was already 18 years old, older than any of my classmates would be. I entered a preparatory course at the Kiev Institute of Civil Engineers. The director of the Institute, Mikhail Khutorianskiy, was a Jew. The majority of the students and many of the lecturers at the Institute were Jews.

There were two events in 1948 that I remember well. The first was the establishment of Israel. Our family was very enthusiastic about it. We celebrated the Israeli Independence Day as a family holiday each year.

Another event was the campaign against cosmopolitans [15](#). We had meetings at the Institute which covered with mud the names of talented Jewish scientists. They fired a few of the lecturers. We also had a hard time. My father was accused of anti-Soviet activities and Zionist propaganda and he began to prepare for arrest. My parents burned their notebooks and letters. The situation was very tense. My father and mother were prepared for the worst. Fortunately, everything turned out all right.

I defended my diploma in 1949 and got an assignment as a foreman at the Santechmontazh Department in Minsk. I lived at the hostel. I worked in Minsk for a year and went to work in the Sanitary Engineering Department of the Ukrpromproject Design Company. I was an engineer and was promoted to senior engineer after a year. In June 1951 I went into the army. I served at the Aerodrome Construction Regiment in Nezhin, in the Chernigov region. I was an engineer. I served about half a year in Nezhin. Then our regiment and I moved to Chernigov. In the summer of 1953 I was transferred to Kiev. From there I was transferred to the Aerodrome Construction Regiment near Pevek village in Chukotka. I arrived there at the end of September. 1953 was the year of the Doctors' Plot [16](#) that I believed was a continuation of the campaign against cosmopolitans. The doctor in our unit was a Jew and the situation became very tense. I received a vacation and went to visit Aunt Riva in Leningrad. Riva's husband was demoted and transferred to Leningrad. I arrived in Leningrad on 2nd March. The following day the authorities announced Stalin's ill health and on 5th March 1953 he died. It was a time of mourning. All the theaters and museums were closed. Crowds of people tried to get to Moscow for his funeral. The trains to Moscow were overcrowded, there were people even on the roofs of the trains. For many people Stalin's death was like the end of the world. His death wasn't a tragedy for me. My parents called him 'shister' -- 'bungler' in Yiddish. I didn't have any illusions about him after 1937. We understood very well that he was aware of everything happening in the country. Of course, many people associated the victory over the fascists with the name of Stalin. They forgot about the beginning of the war and about the numerous senseless victims of the regime. I had a feeling of relief when Stalin died. In April there was a publication circulated concerning the rehabilitation of the Kremlin doctors, and I thought the situation was going to improve. Then came the 20th Party Congress [17](#).

There was a big amnesty after Stalin's death. It didn't cover political prisoners, though. They released from the prisons a large number of criminals. Thousands of these people were at the airport in Pevek. [This is a big town in the north with a prison. There were hundreds of camps and jails in the North with millions of prisoners.] They were waiting at the airport for their turn to take a plane, playing cards and drinking. It was a dangerous situation for the people and the military. The criminals had clashes and hundreds of people were killed in a month's time. The criminals attacked people in the smaller villages. Only one soldier was murdered in our military unit, but in distant military units the number of victims was significant.

At the end of 1954 our unit was transferred to Cape Shmidt. In September 1956 my 3-year term of service in the North was over. I returned to Kiev and went to work at the Yuzhgiprostroy Institute. I got back my former position as senior engineer.

My brother Lev finished school in 1954 and entered the Construction Department of the Lvov Polytechnic Institute. He graduated from there in 1959. After graduation from the Institute my brother volunteered to go to the construction site of the Karaganda Metallurgical Plant in Kazakhstan. Soon my brother became start up activities supervisor at the Koksochimmontazh Enterprise. In 1962 he became a post-graduate student and got a job assignment at the Institute of Construction at the Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tallin. He became a Doctor of Economics and wrote many books. Recently he was awarded the European Union Order for works related to economics. My brother was married twice. Both of his wives were Russian. His first wife's name was Galina Ufimtseva. She was an engineer. Lev and Galina had two children, a son named Victor and a daughter, Irina. Victor and Irina graduated from the Tallin Polytechnic Institute. Lev's son, is an entrepreneur and lives in Tallin; his daughter Irina is an accountant. She lives in the USA with her husband. Galina died in 1995. My brother Lev's second wife Natalia is a lawyer and economist. She works at the same institute as my brother. My mother didn't have any objections to the marriage of Lev to a non-Jewish woman. My father was stricter in regard to Jewish traditions, but he had no objections either after he met Galina, Lev's future wife. Both of them liked Galina and their grandchildren.

Our house was removed under the general construction plan of Kiev. Leonid and his wife and we received two separate two-room apartments in Nivki, a distant neighborhood in Kiev. These were two neighboring apartments and they made another door connecting these two apartments. They were small apartments but we were very happy to have them. We often had guests. We celebrated Soviet and Jewish holidays. My mother became the guardian of Jewish traditions in our family after my grandmother died. She began to arrange family gatherings at Jewish holidays. Our whole family got together on Yom Kippur and Pesach. Aunt Riva came from Moscow every year to spend Pesach with us. Mother made traditional Pesach food. She took her chickens to the shochet at Podol. My father went to synagogue on all the holidays. There was one synagogue on Schekavitskaya Street in Kiev. I don't remember anybody praying at home. They all prayed at the synagogue. We bought a lot of matzah, although I took plain sandwiches with bread to work. Our family fasted on Yom Kippur. They didn't follow the laws of kashrut, although my father never ate pork, sausage or tinned meat. My mother was less strict about such things, and she loved to treat all of us except for my father, of course, with a pork chop or a ham.

## **Married life**

I got married in 1962. My wife Maria Golub [nee Dinavetskaya], a Jew, was born in Uman in October 1927. Her father Naum Dinavestky was an accountant and her mother Anna Dinavestskaya was a housewife. They didn't celebrate any Jewish traditions and they spoke Russian in the family. They had two daughters: Maria, and Sophia, who was born in 1915. In 1934 the whole family moved to Kiev. Maria went to school and finished 6 grades before the war. We didn't have a wedding party. We had a civil ceremony and my mother cooked a festive dinner for all the members of our families. We lived in my wife's apartment with her sister (her parents had died by then). Later, after Maria's sister died, my mother moved in with us.

Maria's father worked as an accountant at the Voenstroy Military Construction Company. Sophia studied at the Odessa Communications Institute by correspondence and worked as a radio operator at the Giprosviaz Institute. Her husband, Pavel Svirgunenko, a Ukrainian, worked in the Radio Security Department of the NKVD. Their son was born before the war. At the beginning of the war

the family evacuated to Kuibyshev. Sophia worked as an accountant at the post office and Naum worked as an accountant in a company. Sophia's son fell ill and died in the evacuation. In 1944 they returned to Kiev. Pavel was a higher official in the NKVD.

Maria took a preparatory course at the Institute of Civil Engineers and after finishing it became a student at the Institute. In 1949 she graduated from the Sanitary Engineering Faculty of the Engineering Construction Institute and received a job assignment at the construction site of the Volga-Don Channel. She had to work with prisoners there. Upon completion of the construction she was transferred to the construction site of the Stalingrad power plant. She was an engineer in the Operations Department of the Sanitary Engineering Headquarters. Some time in 1955 Sophia quit her job to look after her mother who got sick. Maria also managed to quit work. She returned to Kiev and was hired as an engineer in the Sanitary Engineering Department at the Giprograd Institute. She developed designs for apartment buildings. In 1963 Maria was transferred to the Regional Housing Design Institute where she worked until she retired in 1983. She worked as senior engineer, chief engineer and chief specialist at the Institute. In 1987 she had a myocardial infarction and had to go to the hospital every 4-5 months afterwards. Maria died in the hospital in July 2000.

I don't remember exactly when my father retired. He actually worked up until the end of his life. A year before he died he started having liver problems, and he died on 14th June 1983. My father was buried at Berkovtsy, in the Jewish section of the town cemetery. The Jewish cemetery was closed at that time.

My mother and father lived in Nivki. After my father died my mother remained alone there, though Leonid's wife Tsylya was living in the next-door apartment. In the late 1980s my mother had a stroke. It was difficult for her to be living alone, and we decided that she should move to our apartment. By that time Maria's sister Sophia had died and mother moved in with us. She died in 1995. We buried her beside my father. Jewish traditions left our house with her.

In the 1970s Jews began moving to Israel. We were very sympathetic to them. We were also thinking about emigration. My father was willing to go. But the circumstances were such that we couldn't leave. Maria's sister was very ill and we couldn't leave her alone.

I continued to work after I retired. My pension was too small, and I had to earn extra money. In the late 1980s the whole sanitary engineering group of which I was the manager moved to Israel. I got a job offer from the Yuzhgiprostroy where I worked at the beginning of my career. I accepted this offer and that's where I work now.

Over the past 10 years Jewish life in Ukraine has become more active. I can't say that I'm far removed from these activities, but I rarely get involved in them. I receive food from Hesed and I appreciate their efforts. My co-student and close friend Henry Filvarov is an activist in the Jewish movement. He keeps me posted on all Jewish events. I appreciate his care. Henry is vice-president of the Jewish Heritage Institute which is involved with the Jewish Heritage Restoration Program funded by Jerusalem. Filvarov is program manager. I prepare materials for this program and take an active part in its implementation. We issue descriptions of buildings that previously belonged to Jewish communities: synagogues, schools, hospitals, etc. We have issued descriptions of over 100 facilities. I'm very happy to participate in this noble mission.

## Glossary

### **1 Five percent quota**

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in institutions of higher education could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

### **2 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the 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.

### **3 Babi Yar**

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

### **4 Podol**

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

### **5 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population (apart from certain privileged families) was only allowed to live in these areas.

### **6 Sholem Aleichem, 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.

### **7 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the

rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

## **8 Young Octobrist**

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

## **9 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.

## **10 NKVD**

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

## **11 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

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

## **12 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

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

## **13 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.

#### **14 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

#### **15 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'.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 20th Party Congress**

At the 20th 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.