

# Dora Slobodianskaya

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Chernovtsy

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Dora Slobodianskaya lives in a big three-bedroom apartment in the center of Chernovtsy with her husband Boris and granddaughter Marina. Dora is a tiny woman with nicely done gray hair. She is a very sociable lady and still takes an active part in public life regardless of her age. She prepares material for the monthly radio program of 'Dos Yidishe Wort'. Besides Dora collects information about victims of the Holocaust and sends questionnaires that she fills in to Yad Vashem [1](#). She is fond of Jewish folk songs, which she collects and sings in the Veteran Club in Hased. Dora also reads a lot.

My parents and their families came from the Moldavian town of Faleshty. It was a small town in Bessarabia [2](#). Before 1918 it belonged to Russia. After World War I Faleshty became part of Romania. The majority of its population was Moldavian and Jewish, but there were also Russians and Ukrainians. A church and a choir synagogue were in the main square. The choir synagogue was the biggest and most beautiful of all the synagogues in town and was attended by wealthy Jews and local Jewish intellectuals. There were several smaller synagogues around town. There was a cheder as well as Romanian secondary schools. Jews lived in the center of town. Moldavians, for the most part, lived on the outskirts of town where land was less expensive. They had big orchards and vineyards. There were never any pogroms] or even minor conflicts between the different nationalities in Faleshty. There was a spring on the outskirts of town. Water was delivered by a horse-driven cart with a huge barrel filled with water from that spring. There was a barrel in the corner of my father's shop, which the water carrier filled with water. We paid him for this service.

Power supply was provided in 1938. Before then there were kerosene lamps to light the houses. We had nice bronze kerosene lamps in the house. Before holidays these lamps were polished with chalk. There were cobblestone pavements and ground sidewalks in Faleshty. Owners of houses swept and cleaned the area near their houses. There was a lot of mud when it rained and people wore knee-high rubber boots.

My grandfather on my father's side, Aron-Itzyk Melman, was born in the late 1860s. His family came from Faleshty. My grandfather was the youngest in the family. His brothers and sisters moved to the US, Palestine and Argentina at the end of the 19thXIX century. My grandfather was a short slim man with a well-groomed beard. He always wore a long black jacket. He wore a kippah at home, but he put on a black hat when he left home. My grandfather was a very nice and kind man. He died of pneumonia in 1938 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Faleshty. My grandmother, Dvoira Melman, also came from Faleshty. She was born in the 1870s.

My grandfather was a shahmmash in the main synagogue. My grandmother was a housewife. My grandfather didn't earn much, and she had to do her best to make ends meet. They lived in a small

house near the synagogue in the center of town. There was a small shed and a toilet in the backyard. They were a very religious family. They observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. My grandfather was a well-respected man in Faleshty. When somebody needed to borrow money he was asked to be a guarantor between the parties. He took the responsibility to pay back a debt in case a debtor wasn't able to do so, but my father told me that it never came that far. My grandfather charged some interest for his service.

My grandparents had three sons and a daughter. The oldest, Motl, was born in 1897, my father, Wolf, in 1901, Zeilik in 1903 and Feige in 1905. The boys finished cheder. Feige was educated at home; her brothers and parents taught her mathematics and how to read and write in Yiddish. My father didn't tell me much about his childhood - he was a taciturn man and didn't like to recall the past.

My grandfather didn't remarry after my grandmother's death in 1912. Other relatives helped him to raise the children. The sons studied crafts after they finished cheder. Motl got involved in farming and Zeilik became a shoemaker. When they were old enough they got married. They had traditional Jewish weddings in a synagogue. They started their own businesses. Motl and his family moved to Kalineshty village. Motl and his wife Rechl had five children: Srul, Khona, Reizl and the twins Khova and Moishe. They perished when the Germans occupied Kalineshty in 1941. Zeilik, his wife and two sons managed to evacuate. After the war they settled down in Chernovtsy. Zeilik died in Chernovtsy in the 1960s. His sons are doing well. They graduated from a construction institute and work as engineers for private companies. They are both married and have adult children. Feige married Yekhil Rozhansky, a shoemaker. They had two daughters. I don't remember the older daughter's name. The younger one, Tube-Rechl, and I were the same age. Feige, her husband and both daughters were shot by the fascists in Faleshty in 1941.

After finishing cheder at the age of 11 my father studied to become a fur specialist. His tutor, Shloime Shnaiderman, lived in the same neighborhood. He was my mother's father, my future grandfather. He was born in Faleshty in the 1870s. His wife, Perl Shnaiderman, also came from Faleshty and was the same age as my grandfather. He was a fur specialist. He bought sheep and lamb skin from farmers and made hats and other things of fur. There were two or three employees and a few apprentices in his shop. My grandmother was a housewife. The shop was in their house.

They had seven children: five daughters and two sons. My mother, Golda, was born in 1905. She was the oldest in the family. The next child, Nehama, was born around 1907, Mindl in 1910 and Sheindl in 1913. Then came two sons: Yankel, born in 1916, and Shmil, born in 1918. Khaya, the youngest in the family, was born in 1922. The boys studied at cheder, the daughters were educated at home. They had a teacher from cheder who taught them Hebrew, Yiddish, the Torah and Talmud, history, literature and mathematics. They spoke Yiddish at home.

The family was religious. They observed Jewish traditions. My grandmother strictly followed the kashrut. She had separate utensils and tableware for meat and dairy products, and different pieces of cloth for washing dishes for meat and dairy products. They celebrated Sabbath. On Friday mornings my grandmother began to cook food for Saturday. She baked challah bread in the Russian stove [3](#), made carrot tsimes, gefilte fish and clear chicken soup. She left pots with food in the oven to keep the food warm. She made Jewish stew, cholent and chicken. My grandmother baked delicious strudels and honey cake - the best I've ever had in my life. On Saturdays my

grandparents dressed up to go to the synagogue. When they returned my grandfather read the Torah and prayed.

Their daughters cleaned and washed the house thoroughly before Pesach. They walked the rooms with a candle looking for chametz, breadcrumbs. My grandmother and her daughters took fancy dishes down from the attic to use them on Pesach and put utensils for everyday use in the attic. They ordered matzah at the synagogue, which was delivered in white cloth bags. They ate matzah during Pesach, and my grandmother baked pastries from matzah and matzah flour. She made chicken broth, gefilte fish and matzah and potato puddings. She always made strudels, honey cakes and cookies. My grandfather conducted seder on the first night of Pesach.

After the October Revolution of 1917 [4](#) in Russia, young Jewish people in Romania became very fond of revolutionary ideas. My mother's sister Mindl became a member of an underground revolutionary group. Members of this group studied works by Marx and Lenin, distributed flyers with communist ideas and arranged parades on 1st May. The Romanian police had lists of young people involved in revolutionary activities. Every year before 1st May there was a search in my grandfather's house. Policemen were looking for underground books or posters, which they never found. The other children didn't share Mindl's enthusiasm. My mother's younger brother, Yankel, was a shoemaker. Shmil and Khaya finished a course of tractor drivers and began to work in a tractor crew. Before the war Khaya married Pinia Kislyuk, a Jewish man from Faleshty, who was also a tractor driver. Yankel and Shmil were single.

My father met my mother when he became an apprentice to my mother's father at the age of 11. My mother was 7 years old then. When they grew up they fell in love with one another. Grandfather Shloime gave his consent to their marriage. They got married in 1924 when my mother was 19 and my father 23 years old. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. Two years after the wedding my father bought a house from a Jewish family that moved to Argentina. The house was in the main street of town. When my father bought the house he quit his job in my grandfather's shop and opened his own leather shop. He purchased black and gray sheep and lambskin from farmers in the neighboring villages. He put sheepskin in a tanning solution that had a terrible smell. Afterwards the sheepskins were dried in the yard. When they were dry my father removed the inner layer of the leather and treated the skins with a fur polishing solution. Then they were placed in a big drum with sawdust. It had to be rolled with a handle for 12 hours before the sheepskins were ready for further handling. They were brushed and then my father made hats, collars and coats. He had a special sewing machine for leather. After the harvest in the fall Moldavians came to buy hats from my father. My father had two to three apprentices. They learned at his place for a couple of years and after their apprenticeship my father paid them for their work.

Jews settled down in central parts of towns because they were tradesmen and craftsmen in their majority and had more business opportunities and clients, if they lived close to the center. Land was expensive and the cost of a house was based on the width of the façade of the house. Therefore, Jews made facades of their houses narrow to reduce the cost. Our house was like this - built with its narrow façade facing the street and advancing into the backyard with its wide part. The rooms were in a row and accessible from a long hallway. The first and biggest room was my father's shop. The next one was the dining room, then came the kitchen, my parents' bedroom, a nursery room and a living room. There was a door to the backyard leading onto a verandah annexed to the back of the house. There was a cellar where my mother stored eggplants, carrots

and parsley during winter. She also kept tinned vegetables and fruit. There was a big shed in the backyard of the house. My father bought wheat in the fall and kept it in this shed. There was a toilet behind the shed. We had several fruit trees in the backyard. There was a fence around the house and a gate with a lock. My father's sister Feige, her husband and two daughters lived in the same neighborhood.

I was born in this house in 1930. I was named Dvoira but was always called Dora. My mother's grandmother Esther moved in with us after I was born. She was widowed a long time before. My great-grandmother was the oldest in the family and had helped her mother to raise her brothers and sisters. When she joined us she helped my mother to raise my brother and me.

My brother was born in 1933. He was named Shmil. I was very jealous of him because I was told that I was his older sister, and I thought that I was no longer a child and my parents were going to give me less of their love. I remember the ritual of circumcision of my brother. Actually, I don't recall the ritual as such. All I remember is that there was a rabbi and many old Jewish men with long gray beards. I also remember the party. Many children were invited and there was a wooden baby cradle full of candy in the yard. When the cradle was rocked candies fell out and children picked them up. My father hired klezmer musicians, who played Jewish music. Guests danced and enjoyed themselves.

My great-grandmother always wore black clothes. She wore a black kerchief over a white kerchief. My grandmother told me that when my great-grandmother got married she had her hair shaved and began to wear a wig. Once my great-grandmother went to visit my grandmother Perl and fell ill there. She wanted to be taken back to our home, so my father went to pick her up. He also brought a doctor to examine her. She had pneumonia. She was ill for several weeks before she died in 1936. She was about 100 years old. She was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery in Faleshty. This was the first time I saw a Jewish funeral. My great-grandmother lay on straw in the room. All relatives were sitting around her crying. They had their shoes off. My great-grandmother was wrapped into a white shroud.

We also had a housemaid, a Jewish girl from a poor family. She did all the housework, worked from morning till night, and my mother paid her. My mother followed the kashrut. We spoke Yiddish at home. My parents were religious. On Saturdays and on Jewish holidays they went to the synagogue. My father had a black suit and a black hat that he only wore when he went to the synagogue. Women had to wear black clothes to the synagogue. My mother had two fancy black dresses, a silk dress and a woolen one, as well as a silk shawl.

We always celebrated Shabbath at home. My mother made dough for challah bread in a big bowl on Friday mornings and went to the market to do some shopping. When she returned she started baking challahala bread. She always made gefilte fish and chicken broth. After she took the challahala bread out of the oven she put Jewish stew with meat, potatoes and beans in a ceramic pot into the oven. It stayed there until lunch on Saturday. It wasn't allowed to heat food or do any work on Saturdays, but the food was kept warm until the next day that way. A Moldavian farmer, who lived on the outskirts of town, came to all Jewish houses in our neighborhood to light kerosene lamps and stoke stoves. Jewish families paid him for doing this. He was paid on other days because it was forbidden to touch money on Saturdays. In the evening the family got together for the ritual of lighting candles. My mother wore her best gown and said a prayer over the candles before she lit

them. Then a general prayer for the health and wealth of all those that were dear to us followed, and afterwards the family sat down for dinner. We had silver shot glasses for festive dinners. My father drank a shot of vodka and my mother brought fish sprayed with herbs in from the kitchen. After dinner my father read the Torah to the family.

Pesach was my favorite holiday. Long before Pesach my mother and the housemaid began with the cleaning of the house. Furniture was removed from all the rooms to paint the walls and wash the floors. The house was shining before the holiday. My brother and I went around the house with a candle and chicken feather looking for breadcrumbs. We swept whatever we found on a sheet of paper, and later it was burned in the stove. Fancy dishes were taken from the attic and everyday utensils were taken away.

A Jewish bakery in Faleshty stopped baking bread to make matzah for Pesach. A rabbi had to inspect the bakery and issue a certificate to confirm that any bread or dough with yeast had been removed. Matszah was put into 10 kilo linen bags to be delivered to Jewish homes. Every family needed a lot of matzah because it wasn't allowed to eat bread for the eight days at Pesach. Pastries were also made of matzah flour. My mother bought live chickens and geese from farmers and took them to the shochet. Goose skin and fat were melted in a frying pan, and afterwards onions were fried in it. My mother made chicken broth and added finely cut matzah. She also made goose stew and gefilte fish. My mother made delicious strudels with nuts and jam, honey cakes and little round cookies that melted in the mouth. On the first evening of Pesach my father conducted seder. The table was laid with a snow-white tablecloth. Traditional food, wine and beautiful high silver wine glasses with engraved Stars of David were sitting on the table. There was always one extra wine glass for Elijah, the Prophet<sup>2</sup>. My mother told us that he came to every Jewish house to bless it. During seder everyone had to drink four glasses of wine. When my brother and I were small we were given water with a drop of wine in it. On the other days of Pesach we went to visit relatives or had guests at home. My father's shop was closed and his apprentices left to see their families.

On Yom Kippur the family fasted. Children were supposed to fast from the age of 5. My mother was always upset because we were so thin. On other days she worked to give us more food while during the fast she begged us to be patient and wait until the fast was over. She told us that God would bless us with a good year for our patience. Before holidays our relatives and acquaintances came to ask forgiveness for intentional and unintentional insults. My parents also made the rounds of other homes asking forgiveness. Christians have a different theory - repent and God will forgive you - but Jews believed that God couldn't forgive people. We always had the ritual of kapores conducted before Yom Kippur. My mother bought white hens for herself and me and white roosters for my father and brother. It was necessary to roll the hens over our head and say a prayer repeating the words, 'May you be my atonement'. My mother was very serious about the kapores.

Before the harvest holiday of Sukkot my father made a sukkah in the yard - he installed posts and we twined them with branches. The roof was also made of branches and decorated with ribbons. There was a table in the sukkah, and we had meals there during the whole period of Sukkot. On Chanukkah all children got Chanukkah money. Another favorite holiday of mine was Purim when my mother made hamantashen. Every family sent messengers with shelakhmones, gifts for their relatives, friends and neighbors, and they also received gifts from them. Performances were arranged in the main square. People dressed in Purimshpil costumes made the rounds of Jewish

homes with their performances and got some money for it.

I attended a Jewish wedding for the first time in 1936. It was Aunt Mindl's wedding. Her fiancé, Avrum Kessler, shared Mindl's revolutionary convictions. They didn't want a traditional wedding with a rabbi, but the family convinced him that a traditional wedding was more of a tribute to traditions. They registered their marriage in the town hall and had a traditional Jewish wedding afterwards. Mindl was in my grandmother's home and wore a white dress and a bridal veil. Her friends were with her and the bridegroom and his friends were waiting in the house next-door. The bridegroom wore a black suit. They had the wedding in the yard of my grandmother's house. The bridegroom, his father and friends came to the house where the bride was waiting. A cantor from the synagogue sang a Jewish wedding song. The bride cried because she felt sad about saying goodbye to her girlhood.

Later everyone went into the yard where a chuppah covered with a crimson brocade with golden patterns had been set up. The bride and bridegroom were taken to the chuppah. A rabbi stood beside the chuppah. He said a prayer and the bridegroom said, 'I take you to be my wife'. Mindl and Avrum exchanged their rings, drank wine from a wine glass and broke the glass. Then they went around the chuppah seven times hand in hand, and the guests shouted 'Mazel tov!' [good luck]. Then the bride and bridegroom started a dance, and the others joined them. After dancing they sat at the table, which was full of traditional Jewish food: gefilte fish, chicken and goose stew. There was a lot of wine and a little vodka. Klezmer musicians were playing at the wedding. My mother's other sister, Sheindl, got married to Shaya Fishman in the winter. They had a chuppah installed in the synagogue. My mother's sister Nehama married Shopse Tirerman at the end of 1939, and they also had a Jewish wedding.

There were no Jewish schools in Faleshty. There was only cheder for boys. I started to study at a Romanian school for girls in 1937. We studied in Romanian. All children spoke fluent Romanian. There were many Jewish girls at this school. Our teachers were very strict. They punished us when we misbehaved - sometimes we even had to kneel in the corner. I have one sad memory associated with that period. When I was 10 or 11 my father believed I was big enough to have wine at seder. The next day I went to school. We had to learn a poem by heart, and I was called to recite it. After the mandatory four glasses of wine I had the night before, I couldn't remember one single line and burst into tears. Since then I've never had another drop of alcohol.

I had classes at school on Saturdays. When I came home my father played records of Jewish music. We had many records of Jewish secular and religious music, and we also had records of Moldavian and Romanian popular music. We often had guests. We sang, danced and told each other stories. Besides Jewish holidays we also celebrated the birthdays of family members. On these days my mother made a festive dinner, and our relatives and friends got together. After dinner adults had discussions or danced and children played in the yard or in the children's room.

My mother was very strict with us, children, but my father spoiled my brother and me. We always turned to him when we wanted something. There was a sausage store near our house, owned by a Moldavian man. There were pork sausages behind the shop-window that looked ever so delicious! How I wished to try them! We never had any pork at home. Once I ran into the store. The storeowner was a kind big man wearing a white gown. He asked me what I wanted. I felt like a criminal but I still bought a piece of pork sausage for my Chanukkah money. I ate it hiding behind

the house. I became obsessed with the idea of buying sausage, and once I asked my father for some money and bought another piece of sausage. After that I began to ask my father for some money regularly. He was quite indulgent when he heard what I spent the money on, but my mother fainted when she heard the news - they heard it from our neighbor, who saw me in the store. My mother was shocked, but when she came back to her senses she said, 'Let that beanpole eat anything she wants, if she only gains some weight!' My mother was deeply concerned with my thinness. Every summer she took my brother and me to a resort in Zakarpatie. It was expensive. Sometimes we rented a room in a village. My brother and I spent a lot of time in the open air, and our mother made food for us. She used to say that children never felt hungry when there was a lot of food available, but if there were no food, they would ask for it. I often recalled these words later when I was in the ghetto.

I had finished the 3rd grade before Moldavia became part of the Soviet Union. In 1940 the USSR declared an ultimatum to Romania about the return of Bessarabia<sup>3</sup>, which became part of Romania in 1918. Romania agreed to transfer these areas. There was anarchy in our streets for three days after the Romanian army had left and the Soviet army hadn't arrived yet. Everyone came into the streets when the Romanian army was leaving. There were tables with bread, butter, sausage and new Moldavian wine in the streets. People liked the Romanians - life in town was good when they were in power. On 28th June 1940 everyone in town came out into the streets to meet the Red Army. According to Russian tradition the 'liberators' were met with bread and salt. We liked to see Russian soldiers talking to officers and addressing each other with the word 'comrade'. There was a strict subordination in the Romanian army, and it was hard to imagine anything like that.

The euphoria about the 'liberation' was over soon. There was a lack of food products in stores, and people were queuing to buy food. Bread in stores had a terrible taste. We were starving. Children and older people were starving to death. Due to the currency change one ruble was 40 lei, and we didn't have enough money to buy the most necessary things. People who moved here from the USSR were astonished how inexpensive life was in our area. A chicken cost 40 lei at the market. It was rather cheap for them while my father had to work a whole day to earn 40 lei. Many wealthier people, Zionists and even those that had been involved in revolutionary activities during the Romanian regime, were arrested and exiled. The Soviet power didn't touch my father since he only had a few apprentices in his shop and therefore wasn't considered an 'exploiter'.

A Russian school was opened in town. All Romanian schools were closed. We didn't know a single word in Russian, and our teacher didn't know Romanian. I was lucky that my parents knew Russian because they grew up in Faleshty when the town belonged to Russia. I became one of the first pioneers in Faleshty, which was a big honor for me.

On 22nd June 1941 the war [the so-called Great Patriotic War] [55](#) began. On Saturday night we were woken by the sound of distant explosions. We thought that this was another military training, which became a routine during the Soviet regime, but in the morning we heard that the war had started and that German and Romanian troops occupied Faleshty. We became captives. Aunt Khaya, her husband Pinia and my mother's brother Shmil went to a collective farm [6](#) before the war. Shmil was captured by the Germans, and we never heard from him again. He must have perished in captivity. Khaya and Pinia managed to escape. Pinia went to the front, and Khaya was in evacuation in the Ural. My mother's brother Yankel was in the army during that period and the rest of the family was at home.

At the end of June the Germans ordered all Jews in Faleshty to come to the main square. Communists and members of their families were taken away and shot. My grandfather Shloime, Aunt Sheindl and her one-year-old daughter Esther, my mother's pregnant sister Nehama, her husband Shopse and his mother, Rivke-Surah Tirerman, were shot that day. Shopse was ordered to dig a grave for his wife and mother before they were all shot. The Germans also shot my father's sister Feige, her husband Esil Rozhansky and their two daughters. About 200 people were killed that day. The rest of us were taken to the ghetto. Old people and children had to march with the rest of us. Mothers were carrying their babies. There were dogs trained to 'herd' people. When someone stepped aside from the group they attacked them and usually went for their throat. Those that got exhausted or couldn't catch up with the rest of us were shot or beaten to death with rifle-butts.

There were four of our family: my parents, my brother and I. My mother was pregnant. Our grandmother Perl, Aunt Mindl, who was also pregnant, and her husband Avrum were also with us. We went from Faleshty to Lymben, Marculesti and Kosoutsy, covering about 100 kilometers. We were allowed to rest for a few hours per day. Once we met German motorcyclists, and they began to photograph us. A Romanian gendarme who saw their craving for sensation, grabbed a baby from a woman and hit its head against the wheels of a cart. In Kosoutsy we were distributed to various ghettos. More than half of those that arrived in Kosoutsy were shot in Kosoutsy forest in one night.

We proceeded to Vinnitsa region: Yampol, Olshanka, Obodovka, Ustye. We stayed in Yampol overnight. My brother and I sat down on the ground. A Romanian officer asked us where we came from and how we happened to be in Yampol. We talked with him in Romanian. The officer ordered his fellow soldier to give us food. We couldn't stop eating. A Jewish ghetto was set up in Ustye village and fenced with barbed wire. The German troops moved on from Ustye, so the ghetto was guarded by Romanian gendarmes. We were accommodated in former cowsheds with ground floors covered with a thick layer of frozen manure. There was no heating and no door. We put some straw on the floor and slept there side by side. Men were taken to do road repairs every day. They didn't get paid and weren't given food for their work. The only way we could get food was to exchange clothing for food products in the village. My mother and I knitted socks, sweaters and mittens for villagers. They gave us yarn and paid us with food for our work. My brother Shmil fetched water and brushwood for villagers and helped them with the harvest in the fall.

The winter of 1941-42 was very cold. Many people died every day. Frozen corpses were stored in the anteroom of our dwelling. We passed by them every day, but all our emotions were gone. Sometimes the dead bodies stayed there for weeks, sometimes they were thrown into a pit near our barrack. I slept beside my grandmother Perl - she warmed me at night. One morning I woke up and she was dead. We lived in constant fear. Every week a few people were shot. Nobody knew who was going to be next.

My younger sister Rachel was born in the ghetto in March 1942. A few days later Aunt Mindl's daughter, Esphir, was born. All tenants of our barrack helped to raise the girls and brought us whatever they had. A woman living next-door taught me how to swaddle babies.

The Roumanians allowed inmates of the ghetto to go out, but no further than to the village. My mother and I went to villagers' houses to take their knitting orders. One winter day in 1942 my mother and I took a sweater to a woman, who lived on the outskirts of the village. She gave us a



bottle of sunflower oil, salt and matches for our work. When she went out to see us off she suddenly pushed us back into the house. The woman told us that she saw a group of Jews accompanied by gendarmes in a convoy. She saved our life that time. Another incident happened in February 1943. My mother and I were on our way home with some potatoes and flour that we received for our work. We met an old villager who told us to come into his house immediately. He said that he had seen that Jews were being shot in the ghetto. We stayed in his house for several hours before he let us return to the ghetto. We found out that a Romanian soldier had disappeared and the Romanians shot 40 Jews in reprisal for him. There was another tragedy in the ghetto in May 1943. There was a German hospital in Vinnitsa where they kept wounded German soldiers from the front. They ran out of stocks of blood for blood transfusions. Some doctors from that hospital came to the ghetto, selected ten Jewish boys of 14-15 years of age with the required blood group, took their blood to the very last drop and left.

In the summer of 1943 a group of men, including my father and Mindl's husband, were sent to the construction of a bridge across the Dnieper river in Nikolaev. Before they left the ghetto the Romanians ordered all men to line up near the gate to the ghetto and then every tenth man had to step forward - in effect taking two steps towards death. They were hung on gallows erected along the fence. Our co-tenant, a Roumanian Jew, fell from the gallows three times, and every single time he was hung again. The rest of the men walked to Nikolaev, 300 kilometers from the ghetto. They lived in terrible conditions there. They were ordered to make holes in the ground and lived in those holes. The Germans provided one meal per day - they brought potatoes and threw them in a bowl with water. Prisoners starved and died of diseases and hard work. The Germans usually killed exhausted prisoners, but for some reason they let the group of my father go home. They probably thought the prisoners would die on the way anyway. My father was either dragging Uncle Avrum or carried him on his back all the way home. They managed to get back to the ghetto.

We didn't observe any Jewish traditions in the ghetto - life was too hard. Many people stopped believing in God. They couldn't believe that He would let these tragic things happen. We were living on the brink of hope that rescue would come. We were liberated on 24th March 1944 when the Soviet troops entered Ustye village. The Romanian troops had left the village two days before. We were in a state of stupor and nobody even tried to leave the ghetto before the Soviet troops arrived in the village. Then we started on our way home to Faleshty. We walked following the frontline. Sometimes we got into bombardments, sometimes we got a ride on villagers' carts and sometimes military trucks gave us a lift. We reached our house, which hadn't been ruined. Mindl, her husband, their daughter Esphir and our family settled down there.

In September 1944 I went to the 6th grade. When I turned 14 I became a Komsomol [7](#) member. I took part in all Komsomol activities, attended meetings and spoke at the meetings. My brother also went to school, and my father became a worker at the garment factory.

We went to Kalineshty village where my father's brother Motl and his family lived before the war. Their neighbors told us that his family perished at the very beginning of the war. We never got to know whether they were killed by the Germans or by locals - that might have happened, too. Aunt Sheindl was shot in Faleshty. Her husband, Shaya Fishman, survived. In the middle of June 1941 he went to see his relatives in Beltsy. He was arrested by the Roumanians there but pretended he was Georgian and they released him. He moved to Balta, Odessa region, and worked for a Romanian owner of a fur shop until the end of 1944. In 1944 he volunteered to go to the front to take revenge

for his family. He was killed in action near Budapest. My mother's brothers, Shmil and Yankel, perished in captivity. We lost over 30 close and dozens of distant relatives during the war. There were only nine survivors of our families.

Pinia Kislyuk, Aunt Khaya's husband, was on the front during the war. After he demobilized he was sent to work at the railway station in Chernovtsy. In 1945 Khaya, Pinia and their son Arkadiy, born in the evacuation in the Ural in 1941, moved to live in Chernovtsy. Their daughter Nina was born after the war. Aunt Khaya was a housewife after the war. In the 1970s their family moved to Israel. Khaya died in Israel in 1991. Her daughter Nina, her husband and two children live in Beer-Sheva in Israel. Khaya's son Arkadiy and his family live in Canada. Mindl, her husband and their daughter also moved to Israel. Mindl died in Israel in the late 1990s.

I finished lower secondary school in Faleshty in June 1946. I wanted to continue my studies, but there were no higher educational institutions in Faleshty. My parents were thinking of moving to a bigger town with more Jews and more opportunities for us to study. They corresponded with Khaya and decided to move to Chernovtsy. When we arrived there we settled down in Pinia and Khaya's home. We liked the town. It was a beautiful town. Besides the majority of the population was Jewish. After the war one could hear people speaking Yiddish in the streets. There was a synagogue, a Jewish school and even a Jewish theater. Shortly after we arrived Pinia helped my parents to get two rooms in the basement of a house. We had to renovate them before we could live in them.

I went to the 9th grade of a Russian school. There was a Jewish school in town, but I intended to get a higher education and all higher educational institutions were Russian. I spoke fluent Russian by that time and had no problems with studying. I got along well with my classmates. Many of them were Jews. There was no anti-Semitism at that time. I finished school with a silver medal and entered the Faculty of Biology at Chernovtsy University in 1948. I was a first year student when the campaigns against cosmopolitans [8](#) began. This process involved scientists and cultural workers that were arrested and sent to camps. They were innocent people, and we understood that it was just a preparatory step before the authorities started persecuting all Jews. Jews were accused of propagating Zionism, espionage and God knows what. The word 'Zionist' became a curse- word at that time. Several Jewish lecturers were fired from university. The Jewish theater and Jewish school were closed. KGB informers patrolled the area near the synagogue. They didn't pay any attention to older Jews, but when they noticed a young man go into the synagogue they informed his management that he was under the influence of Zionism. At that time this might have resulted in dismissal or even arrest.

My father was a laborer at the garment factory. He had a low salary, but he had to go to work. There was a law against jobless people. They were called 'parasites', and militia offices were responsible for making them go to work. My father made hats at home. He purchased sheepskin from villagers and treated them until they were ready to make hats out of them. There was a woodshed in the yard of the house where my father placed barrels with tanning and painting solutions. My mother assisted him. She, poor thing, rolled the drum with sawdust at night. The earnings of my father's extra work were often higher than his salary. My mother stayed at home looking after my little sister and my brother. He was sickly after our time in the ghetto. When he couldn't go to school my mother helped him do his homework.

My parents celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays after we moved to Chernovtsy. Every Friday my mother lit candles, and afterwards the family sat down for a festive dinner. In the first years in Chernovtsy my mother made matzah at home. Later a Jewish bakery was opened. All Jews in Chernovtsy knew its address. They brought flour for matzah at dusk and returned to pick up bags with matzah late at night. My father and mother went to the synagogue on holidays. We were short of money, but my father made contributions to the synagogue and also paid for a seat for himself and my mother. My mother also saved money from my father's salary to buy food for a festive meal on holidays. She always managed to make gefilte fish, chicken broth and strudels. My father always conducted seder on Pesach. My parents followed all fasting rules. We spoke Yiddish at home.

I did very well at university. I was elected Komsomol leader of the students of my year, but in 1952, at the height of the struggle against cosmopolitans, I got almost expelled from the Komsomol and dismissed from university. My fellow student, Haim Rabin, a Jew, corresponded with his sister residing in Israel. All other students were aware of it. Later he moved to his sister in Israel. Our Komsomol leaders blamed me that I failed to talk him out of emigration to a capitalist country. They said it was my duty to be on guard in such situations while I almost became a supporter of Zionism. Those were serious accusations at that time. My future husband, Boris Slobodianskiy, helped me. He was secretary of the Komsomol committee at the garment factory. He knew the secretary of the town committee of the Komsomol well. He reviewed my 'case' and said that there were no reasons for such accusations. The Komsomol meeting of my fellow students and the Komsomol meeting of the Faculty approved my expulsion from the Komsomol. There was only the district committee of the Komsomol that we had to go to in order to get a final decision. I went there with the secretary of the Komsomol organization of the Faculty. On our way I asked him, 'Kostya, why?' He replied, 'I don't know why, Dora, but this is how things are'. The district committee of the Komsomol didn't approve the decision of the Faculty to expel me.

Uncle Pinia's brother worked at the garment factory. He introduced me to my future husband. Boris was born to a poor family in Poyana village, Rezin district, Romania, in 1926. His father, Moshe Slobodianskiy, leased a field to grow tobacco. His mother, Pesia Slobodianskaya [nee Koopershtok], was a housewife. Boris had two sisters: Khaya, born in 1922, and Sheiva, born in 1932. His family was religious. They observed all Jewish traditions and raised their children religiously. During the war Boris, his mother and younger sister were in evacuation in Kata-Kurgan, Uzbekistan. His father died when he moved the cattle of the collective farm to the Caucasus in 1941. Boris worked at a collective farm and later on a construction site. In 1944 he went to the front and served in the army until 1950. He served with the Soviet troops in Germany. He became a member of the Communist Party in 1948. After the war his mother and sister moved to Chernovtsy, and Boris joined them after demobilization. He became a human resource inspector at the factory where his mother worked. Boris finished an evening secondary school and entered the Faculty of Economics at Chernovtsy University. He studied there by correspondence. He became secretary of the party organization of the factory. Boris was very busy with his party activities. His mother died in 1958.

We got married in 1952. We had a civil ceremony and my parents arranged a festive dinner party for us. My parents wanted us to have a traditional Jewish wedding, but my husband was a communist and it was unacceptable for him.

Boris received a room in a communal apartment [9](#) from his factory. We installed partitions to arrange a kitchen and a bathroom in the room. The room was dark and damp, but it seemed like paradise to us. We received an apartment 20 years later.

In March 1953 Stalin died. There was a marble bust of Stalin on the second floor of the university. Lecturers and students got together next to the bust. We were grieving over Stalin and many of us cried sincerely. Gradually we came to understand the situation. After the Twentieth Party Congress [710] I believed every word of Khrushchev [811]. He revealed the truth about the tyranny of Stalin and his companions. I guess, many people understood these things before, but refused to believe that it could be happening to us. I hoped that the bad times were over and that Jews had finally lived through their hard time, but I was wrong. Anti-Semitism continued.

I graduated from university in 1953. I was offered a job at a Ukrainian school. I didn't know the language, and it was a difficult year for me. In the fall I was going to take exams to be admitted to a post-graduate course. I had publications and my favorite professor told me that there was a vacancy at the university for me, but during the entrance exams it turned out that there was another candidate - a demobilized officer. I got the highest grades at my exams in Biology and English, but my exam in Marxism-Leninism lasted over two hours. They looked for a chance to give me a satisfactory mark, but I answered all their questions. However, they still put a satisfactory mark, which I didn't even argue about. It was useless. I couldn't be a competitor to a non-Jewish officer and party member. I returned to my school and taught biology until I retired in 1981, when my granddaughter Marina was born.

My daughter was born on 22nd May 1959. We named her Polina, and she also has a Jewish name, Pesia-Perl, after Boris' mother and my grandmother Perl. I had had a few miscarriages before my daughter was born. The doctors said that former inmates of ghettos had problems with pregnancy due to hard living conditions in their childhood. My husband and I had to go to work, but there were no kindergartens available. I didn't want to quit my job because I feared that I wouldn't be able to get another one. My parents helped me raise my daughter. Polina went to kindergarten at the age of 5. My husband and I spoke Yiddish at home. My parents also spoke Yiddish with my daughter, and she said her first words in Yiddish. Our neighbors were loyal to us. One of our neighbors, an old Russian woman, told me that I should speak Yiddish with Polina since she needed to know her mother tongue.

We celebrated Soviet holidays at home. Soviet holidays were days off and we took advantage of this chance to get together and have a party. We enjoyed such occasions very much. My parents continued to celebrate Shabbath and all Jewish holidays after the war. We visited them on Jewish holidays and participated in the seder on Pesach. My father died in 1968. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery in Chernovtsy in accordance with Jewish traditions. My mother died in 1983. The Jewish cemetery was closed, but we still buried my mother next to my father. There is an inscription in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian on their common gravestone.

My brother and sister finished the College of Light Industry in Chernovtsy. They became production engineers in the garment industry. My brother was a production engineer, and my sister became a forewoman in a shop. My brother married a nice Jewish girl and they had two children. In the 1970s my brother and his family moved to Israel. They live in Bat-Yam. My sister married Isaac Dinishenskiy, a Jew, in 1962. They have a son and a daughter. Since my sister was born in the

ghetto she always had health problems. She died in Chernovtsy in 1989. Her older granddaughter was named after her.

In the 1970s many Jewish families began to move to Israel. We sympathized with them. Many of our friends were leaving and we wanted them to have a happy life. As for us, we didn't want to move to Israel. We were afraid that we wouldn't be able to get adjusted to a new life. My husband and I like to be at home, and it's hard for us to change things. Even when we are on vacation we get homesick. Therefore, we decided we'd rather stay.

Polina finished a secondary school. After that she finished a music high school and entered the Music Pedagogical College in Ivano-Frankovsk. It was a smaller town, so it was easier for a Jewish girl to enter a higher educational institution there. Polina returned to Chernovtsy after she finished college and became a teacher at a music school. She still works there. She married a nice young Jewish man. My husband and I were happy that our daughter married a Jewish man. They didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding because my husband was secretary of the party unit of the garment factory. If his daughter had decided to have a Jewish wedding he might have lost his position. Our granddaughter Marina was born in 1981. I helped my daughter raise Marina. Marina finished a Polytechnic College. She is a manager in a company now.

In the late 1980s my husband and I organized a club for old people. This took place at the beginning of perestroika when we felt free. We wanted to take part in the restoration of Jewish life. There were 300 seats in our club, and it was always overcrowded. We arranged meetings twice a week. Poems by Jewish poets were recited and Jewish music and songs were sung. I sang Jewish songs I knew from childhood. There was still anti-Semitism, and my daughter was concerned about a possibility of Jewish pogroms, but we were alright. Our club existed until Ukraine became independent in 1991 and Hesed was established.

We believe that the restoration of the Jewish way of life is our mission. In 1995 my husband established a radio program in Yiddish called 'Dos Yidishe Wort'. It's a monthly program and we get free broadcast time. I help my husband to collect material for this program. We invite many interesting people. About once every three months we broadcast a program on Jewish history.

My husband and I take an active part in the work of Hesed. Once a week my husband conducts a meeting of veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Hesed is our big family. We celebrate holidays and birthdays at Hesed. I also try to do all I can to preserve the memory of the victims of the war. In 1990 I began to collect data about Holocaust victims. I send this information to the Yad Vashem museum in Israel. I've sent over 400 forms there. It's my duty to do everything to contribute to the memory of the innocent people that perished, so that we may never forget this horrific tragedy of our people, the tragedy that took 6 million lives or a lot more, I guess. This must not happen again, and if we don't want it to happen again, we need to know and remember.

Glossary

## **1 Yad Vashem**

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

## **2 Bessarabia**

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

## **3 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in winter time.

## **4 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

## **5 Great Patriotic War**

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

## **6 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **7 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than

the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **8 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'.

## **9 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **10 Twentieth Party Congress**

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

## **11 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

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