

Semyon Falk

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Uzghorod

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Semyon Falk is a short, thin man with gray hair. He lives with his son Victor in a two-bedroom apartment in a two-story house in a new district of Uzghorod. There are just four apartments in this house, which was built in 1961. Almost all furniture and household appliances were also purchased around that time. The apartment is shiningly clean and very cozy. It's hard to believe that there is no woman taking care of the house. Semyon does all the housework himself, including the cooking and repairs. His wife died recently and Semyon still suffers from this terrible loss of someone so dear. There are pictures of his wife everywhere: on the walls, on the table and in the bookcase. Semyon willingly agreed to give us this interview. He turned out to be a very interesting conversationalist.



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My family background

My father's parents lived in the small Ukrainian town of Olevsk in Zhytomyr province [300 km from Kiev]. My grandfather, Abel Falk, was born in the 1860s. I don't know his place of birth. He died of tuberculosis in 1925. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living, but I know that his family was very poor. My grandmother died in the late 1910s. I don't have any information about her. I don't even know her name. I believe she was a housewife, which was customary in Jewish families. They were both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zhytomyr.

My father, David Falk, told me very little about his childhood, the town where his family lived, or about how his family lived. I know that Olevsk was a small town and that Jews constituted about half of its population. There was a Jewish community and a synagogue in Olevsk. Regretfully, I've only been there once. My father took me to visit his relatives when I was 12 years old. Olevsk was a very green town. There were one-story houses for the most part; only in the center there were a few two-story buildings: the town hall and the houses of rich, local people.

There were five children in my father's family. I don't know their dates of birth. The oldest was Pinkhas. The next child was Khasia. My father, born in July 1902, was the third child in the family, and then came his two sisters Adel and Rosa.

My father didn't tell me anything about his studies. I think he went to cheder because he knew Hebrew well. He could read Hebrew and read and write in Yiddish. When he was a pensioner he corresponded in Yiddish with a rabbi from Canada. They discussed articles from the Torah and events of their everyday life. I don't know if any of the children studied in a secondary school. My father may have studied since he worked as an assistant accountant in a shop at the age of 18. Before the Revolution of 1917 [1](#) they only spoke Yiddish in the family. After the Revolution the Russian language was forced into all aspects of life and my father and his sisters and brother switched to Russian. I believe they were all religious before the Revolution, but at the time when I knew them they didn't observe any Jewish traditions and weren't religious.

My father's older brother was a painter. He lived in Olevsk. He was married to a Jewish girl from Olevsk. They had three children: a daughter called Lisa and two sons, Semyon and Michael. Pinkhas' wife died in the late 1930s. During the Great Patriotic War [2](#) Pinkhas and his family evacuated to Middle Asia. Pinkhas perished during evacuation: the barge on which they were crossing the Caspian Sea, was bombed by German planes. Pinkhas was killed. His children stayed in Middle Asia after World War II. Lisa worked as photographer before World War II. I have no information about her life after the war. Semyon was a professional military after World War II. He lived in Alma-Ata, Middle Asia, with his family. We corresponded with him. Michael, the youngest, had tuberculosis and died shortly after World War II.

Khasia, my father's older sister, was a very pretty woman. She married a down-and-out man raised in an orphanage. Her husband, Chaim Bialik, became an orphan in his infancy and was sent to an orphanage. During the Revolution of 1917 he volunteered for the army and was assigned to the cavalry regiment. He was a cavalryman throughout the Revolution and the Civil War [3](#). Bialik joined the Communist Party in the army. When his unit passed through Olevsk he saw Khasia and fell in love with her. When the Civil War was over he demobilized and came to Olevsk. They got married. Of course, they didn't have a Jewish wedding because Bialik was a party member. He didn't have any profession. He went to work as a laborer in the glass factory. He was a hot-tempered, rough man. He was a convinced communist. In 1937 he had an argument with the management and was arrested [during the so-called Great Terror] [4](#). He was sentenced to three years of exile in Chkalov [today Orenburg, Russia]. He was released in May 1941 and returned to Olevsk. A month later World War II began and Bialik was summoned to the army. I don't know where he served. After World War II, he returned and they moved to Korosten [170 km from Kiev]. Bialik bought a water pump and began to sell water for 1 kopeck per bucket. Khasia was a housewife. They didn't have children. Bialik died in the early 1950s and Khasia passed away in 1964. They were buried in the town cemetery in Korosten.

My father's younger sister, Adel, was also very pretty. She was married to a Jewish man with an ugly face. His last name was Poliak. They lived in Olevsk. After World War II they moved to Korosten. They had four children: three daughters called Tsylia, Musia and Maria and a son called Abram. I don't know what Adel's husband did for a living. She was a housewife. Adel died in Korosten in the 1960s. Her daughters and son got married, except for Tsylia, who had always been sickly. In the 1970s they emigrated to Israel with their families. Regretfully, we had no contact with

them. I don't even know in what town they live and have no information about their families.

Rosa, my father's youngest sister, married a Polish Jew. They had two sons. They lived in Korosten. Her husband died young. Rosa was a seamstress in a shop. Her younger son fell ill with tuberculosis in evacuation and died shortly after World War II. Rosa died in Korosten in 1972. Rosa's older son Pyotr studied in Lviv. We lost contact with him. All I know is that he recently died. So, there's no living soul left from this family.

As for my mother's parents, I only knew my grandmother, Elka Keselman. She was born in 1860 but I don't know where. My grandmother was a housewife. My grandfather Avrum-Shmul Keselman was born in Narodichi [160 km from Kiev] in 1859. He was a shoemaker. I don't have any information about his family. I don't know what my grandfather looked like either. His family was poor. My grandmother was a tall, thin, old woman. She wore dark clothes and a black kerchief.

My mother's family lived in the village of Dedkovichi in Zhytomyr province [170 km from Kiev]. My mother's family was the only Jewish family in Dedkovichi. This village was outside the Pale of Settlement [5](#) and Jews weren't allowed residence in this village before the Revolution of 1917. I don't know how my grandfather and grandmother came to live there. Of course, there was no cheder or synagogue in Dedkovichi.

Before and after the Revolution of 1917 and during the Civil War, there were Jewish pogroms [6](#) in Zhytomyr region. There were gangs [7](#) and Denikin [8](#) units involved. My mother told me that the gangs even came to Dedkovichi, although there was just one Jewish family there. The bandits came to their house, beat the family and robbed them, taking away everything they had. There was only one thing that rescued them: the villagers liked my grandfather very much. He was the only shoemaker. Villagers gave shelter to his family and protected them from the bandits.

There were six children in the family. I knew them all, but I don't remember their dates of birth. The first child in the family was Iosif or Yosl. The next one was Yankel. Then came Michael, whose Jewish name was Moshe. The next child born was Solomon, who was affectionately called Monia in the family. Hana was the fifth child, and my mother Sura, born in 1898, was the youngest.

My mother's brothers didn't study in cheder since there was no cheder in Dedkovichi or in the vicinity. The family was religious. They didn't go to the synagogue but they observed Jewish traditions at home. My grandfather prayed at home every day. They only spoke Yiddish at home and Ukrainian with their neighbors. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home. On Yom Kippur my grandmother and all children over six fasted. My mother told me that they didn't make a sukkah at Sukkot. My grandmother baked matzah on Pesach. My grandmother baked bread for a week ahead during the year and challah for Sabbath. They didn't follow the kashrut since it was impossible, being the only Jewish family in the village. However, they didn't eat pork or mix meat and dairy products.

My grandfather died in Dedkovichi in 1918. He was buried in the village cemetery since there was no Jewish cemetery in the village. After he died his children gradually moved to the nearby town of Korosten. Solomon moved to Ovruch [175 km from Kiev]. My grandmother moved to Korosten shortly after I was born. She was growing old and needed somebody to help her around. In Korosten she either lived with us or with her older daughter Hana.

Iosif and his family lived in Korosten. I don't know what profession Iosif had. He married a Jewish girl in Korosten. Iosif wasn't religious, but his family celebrated Jewish holidays at home. They didn't go to the synagogue, though. Iosif had three children. They were very good children. His oldest son, whose name I don't remember, was a professional military. He was a colonel before World War II. Their daughter Bella was a mathematics teacher at a Russian secondary school. The younger son was an engineer at the iron foundry in Korosten. Iosif died in Korosten in 1940. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. After World War II we lost contact with Iosif's family.

My mother's second brother, Yankel, lived with us. I knew him well. My grandfather taught Yankel his profession. Yankel worked as a shoemaker before the early 1930s. He was married and had two children. His son Mutsia was about ten years older than I. There was a daughter, whose name I don't remember. She was two or three years younger than Mutsia. Yankel divorced his wife shortly after his daughter was born. He lived with us. He was religious. He went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays and also celebrated them at home. Yankel's son Mutsia was in the army during World War II. He perished at the front on the first days of the war. Yankel died in Korosten in 1953.

Michael was probably the smartest of my mother's brothers. He finished a Ukrainian elementary school in Dedkovich. There was no chance for him to continue his studies in the village and so he continued to learn by teaching himself. After my grandfather died Michael moved to Korosten. He passed the final exams for a higher secondary school and entered an accountant college. After finishing it he worked as an accountant at the mechanic plant. Michael was an atheist. He was married. His daughter Sophia was his only child. She was born around 1923. Michael died of some chronic disease in 1939. His wife passed away, too. Sophia lives in Lipetsk, Russia. I correspond with her.

Solomon joined the Communist Party after the Revolution. He finished a party course. He married a Jewish woman, who also studied in this party school and became a party official. They lived in Ovruch. Solomon was a party official throughout his life: he was a party leader at a plant and then became an instructor at the district party committee. At that time a party membership card was like a pass to hold any official post. Solomon had two sons and a daughter. His sons perished during World War II and his daughter moved to Israel in the 1970s. Solomon died in Ovruch in the 1960s. He was an atheist.

My mother's older sister Hana was married to a shochet. He lived in Korosten. His last name was Moroz. Of course, he was religious and so was Hana. After the wedding Hana moved to Korosten where her husband lived. They had a son, whose name I don't remember. He was a smart, young man and studied at Kiev University before World War II. His photograph was published in the newspaper called Communist honoring him for being the best student of the university. He spoke fluent German. When the war began he was summoned to the army and sent to a partisan unit. There was no more information from him. He perished. Hana and her husband grew old in Korosten. Her husband died in the 1960s. My parents lived in Lviv then. They took Hana to Lviv. She died there in 1974. She was buried in the town cemetery in Lviv. There was no Jewish funeral.

My parents met through matchmakers. They got married in 1925. I don't know if my parents had a Jewish wedding. After their wedding they moved to Korosten, which was an industrial town. It was easier to find a job there and this must have been an important factor for my parents to move. Besides, almost all my mother's relatives lived there already.

My parents bought an apartment in a one-storied house with three entrances in one of the central streets of Korosten. Every entrance led to an apartment, which consisted of one room and a kitchen. The house was owned by an older Jewish couple that lived in one apartment. The 2nd apartment was rented by the family of a dental mechanic - they were also Jews - and our family lived in the 3rd apartment. My father went to work as an accountant at a brick factory. My mother became a housewife after she got married.

Before World War II about 40,000 people lived in Korosten. It was an ancient town founded back in the 6th century. Many Jews lived in Korosten, just like in many other towns in Zhytomyr region. Jews lived in the center of the town, for the most part. There were only Jews in our street. There were a few plants in the town, as well as a china factory and a garment factory. There were big granite quarries on the outskirts of Korosten. On the other side of town was farmland with orchards and big vegetable fields. There were smaller gardens, in which the owners grew vegetables for their families, in the center of town. Farmers sold their products at the main market. There were so many sellers that they sold their products straight from their wagons lined up in front of the market. There were no scales back then. Vegetables and fruit were sold in buckets and milk in jars. Cottage cheese and butter were wrapped in cabbage leaves and sprinkled with water to keep them cool. There was a Jewish butcher store in the center of the market square. He sold kosher meat.

There were several synagogues in Korosten; I don't know how many for sure. There was a cheder, and a Jewish higher secondary school opened after 1917. It operated until 1941. During World War II it was closed.

Growing up

My older brother Abram was born in Korosten in 1926. He was named after his two grandfathers: his name began with an A - the first letter of his grandfather Abel's name and the first letter of his grandfather Avrum's name. I was born in Dedkovichy on 16th February 1929. My father was at work from early morning till late at night and my mother needed somebody to look after my brother Abram. Therefore, she went to Grandmother Elka to give birth to me. My grandmother helped her to take care of me and look after Abram. Both my brother and I were circumcised in accordance with Jewish traditions. My common name [9](#) is Semyon and my Jewish name is Shymon. When I was three months old my mother took us back to Korosten. My grandmother moved in with us shortly afterwards. My father built a room adjoining our part of the house for my grandmother. Uncle Yankel settled down there, too, after he divorced his wife.

My younger sister Tsylia was born in 1933. We all lived in one room with our parents. We had a stove to heat the apartment. The stove was stoked with wood that was much cheaper than coal. There are woods around Korosten. Wood makes for good construction material for houses and is used for heating. There were two stoves in our apartment: one in the kitchen and one in the room. There was a Russian stove [10](#) with a stove-bench in the kitchen. On cold winter days we, kids, loved to warm up on the bench. My grandmother liked sitting there, too, and my mother also cooked on the stove.

There were just a few pieces of furniture in our room. There was a wardrobe, a sideboard and a big table with chairs around it. There was a big nickel-plated bed next to the wall where our parents slept, and a plank bed where my brother and I slept. My sister slept in a pram. We didn't have money to afford any luxuries. My father had religious books. He kept them in a box in the attic. He

only read when he had some spare time and that happened rarely. We didn't have any fiction books. We spoke Yiddish at home.

My mother took care of all the housekeeping, and my father and we, kids, tried to help her with anything we could do. My brother and I chopped wood and fetched water. We bought water for 1 kopeck per bucket from a vendor near our house. When my father went to work at the water supply trust he had water pipes installed to supply water to the house. That was quite an event! Nobody had water supplied to their homes then and our neighbors came to look at water running from a tap in our house. My mother was very hardworking and quick. We had a few fruit trees in the backyard and she also planted several berry bushes and vegetables. My father built a shed where we kept chickens, geese and a cow. My brother and I took the cow to the meadow and brought it back home in the evening. My mother even taught me how to milk the cow.

My brother went to kindergarten when he was five. It was customary to take children to kindergartens before they started school, for them to learn discipline and get along in a group of children. I was the next to go to the kindergarten and then it was Tsylia's turn. We studied Russian in the kindergarten.

My parents were religious. In the late 1920s the Soviet power began its struggle against religion [11](#). Many churches and synagogues were closed. Although the Church was separated from the state by constitution fierce anti-religious propaganda was carried out. Governmental employees weren't even allowed to attend religious institutions. They could lose their job or be expelled from the Party. My father didn't go to the synagogue, although it operated for some time. However, we celebrated Jewish holidays at home. We didn't follow all the rules on Sabbath, of course. My mother made food for two days on Friday. She baked challah, made gefilte fish and boiled a chicken. My older brother, and later I, brought a chicken to the shochet. When my father came home from work in the evening we celebrated Sabbath. My grandmother and Yankel joined us for the celebration. My mother said a prayer over the candles and lit them. Then the family sat down for dinner. My father blessed the food. Then he and Yankel had a shot of vodka and we all ate the food. However, my father and Yankel had to go to work the next day. Saturday was a working day until the 1970s.

My favorite holiday was Pesach. I enjoyed the preparations for the holiday. I looked forward to the day when we took special fancy crockery and utensils from the attic. I always helped with all chores in the house. Every year a family was chosen to make matzah in their house. Every now and then it happened to be our family. Other neighbors brought flour and joined the party of bakers. Women made the dough and Yankel usually took care of the oven. I was allowed to make little holes with a special little wheel. It took several days to make matzah for all families to last for the eight days of the holiday. There wasn't a breadcrumb to be left in the house during Pesach. Matzah was packed in white cloth bags placed near the stove to stay dry.

My brother and I took geese and chickens to the shochet before the holiday. My mother made strudels and cookies from matzah flour and added what was left after sieving to the chicken broth. There was always gefilte fish, chicken and geese stew on Pesach. We always looked forward to this holiday because of all these delicacies. My father conducted the seder on the first day of Pesach. I have dim memories about this seder. I remember that my father was sitting at the head of the table, which was covered with a white tablecloth. There were glasses of wine on the table and there was always one extra glass. My mother said it was for Elijah, the Prophet [12](#), who came to

every Jewish home on Pesach to bless its tenants. My brother asked my father the traditional four questions [the mah nishtanah]. He didn't know Hebrew, but he learned those questions by heart. Then there was a prayer and we sang traditional songs.

I also remember Chanukkah. My mother lit another candle in the candle stand with eight candles every day. We, children, looked forward to this holiday because every visitor gave us some money. My father and mother's brothers and sisters visited us on Jewish holidays and on Sabbath. They all lived nearby. At Chanukkah they gave us 10-20 kopeck. It was a lot of money. An ice cream cost 5 kopeck and a lollypop 1 kopeck. We could only buy sweets when we got some money of our own. We were poor and those were rare occasions. I don't remember other celebrations. I believe, there were celebrations, but I only remember these two. We also celebrated birthdays at home, but we didn't celebrate any Soviet holidays at that time.

I remember the famine in Ukraine in 1932-33 [13](#). Since our father worked in a governmental office he received food packages and the famine didn't have that big an impact on us. We also grew vegetables and kept livestock and our family didn't starve. I remember this: I was five years old and went to kindergarten. There were talks about children being kidnapped and eaten. I don't know if that really happened, but there was cannibalism during the time of the famine. My mother or father took me to kindergarten and brought me home in the evening; although I used to go there on my own before because this kindergarten was located in our street. I remember the feeling of fear.

I went to a Russian secondary school in 1936. My older brother also studied in this school. There were many Jewish children in our school and in my class, and there were also Jewish teachers. We didn't face any anti-Semitism. Jewish children weren't treated in a different way. I had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. I never focused on their nationality.

I liked mathematics from my first days at school. I liked that everything was so logical and clear. I was always the best pupil in mathematics. I also liked geography, botany and physical education. I became a pioneer in the 4th grade. It was quite a ceremony. We wore red ties around our necks. Then senior pupils greeted us and gave us books about pioneers. We were raised patriots at school. We had political classes and lectures about the international situation at school. We learned patriotic songs in our music classes. I still remember them. My favorite was 'If tomorrow is a war, if tomorrow we start on the march, if dark forces attack us, our Soviet people will stand as one for our great motherland ...'. We did believe that nobody would dare to attack our country since the USSR was invincible and the Soviet army was the strongest in the world. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [14](#) was signed in 1939 the common understanding was that Hitler was afraid of us.

My brother and I spent our summer vacations in a pioneer camp in the village of Ushomir [18 km from Korosten]. We were in the pinewood and there was a wonderful smell in the air. There was a pioneer unit and a pioneer tutor, who stayed in a hut. We had classes and attended clubs. After our afternoon nap we played or went to the woods.

During the time of the arrests in 1937 [during the so-called Great Terror] my uncle Chaim, the husband of my father's sister Khasia, was arrested. We sympathized with her, but we didn't discuss this subject at home. There was something else that made 1937 a memorable year for me: there was a prison in Korosten. The prisoners were brought there from Narodichi, Olevsk and Ovruch. My parents' friends were among them. Their relatives begged my parents to help them arrange a

meeting or give them a parcel. I used to show them the way to the prison. There were many such people, but it never occurred to us that Stalin was to blame for what was happening. We thought there might have been a mistake, but that in general there was nothing wrong in the country.

During the war

I finished the 5th grade in June 1941. My brother and I were to go to the pioneer camp on 1st July. 22nd June 1941 was a Sunday and our father was planning to go fishing with us. There was a radio in our room. Usually, music and entertainment programs were broadcast on Sundays. However, that Sunday, at 12 o'clock, Molotov [15](#) spoke on the radio and we heard about the war. Then there was an announcement that we had to excavate shelters. My father dug a pit in our vegetable garden to serve as shelter for our family. All residents of Korosten made such pits.

On 23rd June my father received his call-up to the front from a registry office. He was told that he was to depart on 24th June. Then they let him go home to spend his last night with his family. At 6am on 24th June the radio announced an air raid. My parents woke us up to take us to the shelter in the pit, but we couldn't leave the house. There were three planes in the sky that dropped small cylinders. That was the last thing I saw. A bomb hit our house. I was sitting by the window and my sister was in her bed. We were all injured. Only my grandmother and Uncle Yankel were all right in their room. My mother had her jaw shattered and her cranial nerve injured. Even after her jaw healed she couldn't open her mouth for a long time and had to be fed with a pump. My father had his arms and head injured with splinters. My brother had his head injured with many splinters, my sister had a splinter in her knee, and I had my head and back injured. We were lucky that the Germans didn't drop firebombs. Later we found out that all our neighbors, except for the dental mechanic's three-year-old daughter, had been killed.

We were taken to hospital where we stayed for three weeks. We heard rumors about what was going on in town. Organizations were leaving, archives were removed and residents were in the process of evacuation. There were occasional minor air raids. Then my father's friend, who was the chief of the air and chemical defense, visited us in hospital. He told us that the Germans were advancing and that we had to evacuate immediately. He gave us his truck and we went to the railway station in Zhytomyr. We were still wearing cast bandages. My grandmother and Uncle Yankel refused to go with us. My grandmother said that she would more likely expect trouble from our government than from the Germans. Many old people didn't understand that fascists and Germans were two different things. They only began to understand this when it was already too late.

Before the war my father had borrowed a piglet to feed it for sale. The piglet was killed during an air raid and our neighbor fried the meat and put it in jars for us to take it with us. Nobody thought about the kashrut then. We just thought about how to survive. We didn't have any clothes or money with us. We were put into a freight train. We didn't know where we were going, but it wasn't that important to us. The train was bombed on our way to Kiev. During air raids the train stopped and passengers scattered around to hide. We stayed inside, due to our condition. From Kiev we moved on to Uman [250 km to the south of Kiev] and wanted to stay there, but the town authorities ordered us to move on, telling us that the Germans would be arriving in Uman in a short while. We went to Chkalov [today Orenburg] region. The train arrived at Platovka station [100 km from Orenburg, 2,500 km from Kiev]. From there people were taken to neighboring villages. We

were taken to the village of Pokrovka, 20 kilometers from Platovka. The local residents met us with flowers at the railway station. They all invited us to stay in their houses. We were accommodated in the house of an old man. He had a big house, in which his family lived, and a wooden hut in the backyard. There was a big room and a kitchen. There were five of us and we came to stay in this house.

My father lived with us for two or three months. When his arm had healed he went to the army. However, his right arm never functioned properly again, and he was taken to a reserve maintenance military unit.

My grandmother and Uncle Yankel left Korosten a month after us, when they heard about the brutality of the fascists from refugees escaping from the West. They were in a much more difficult situation during evacuation than we. They went to Northern Caucasus where they stayed for some time. When the Germans began to approach the Caucasus they crossed the Caspian Sea on a ferry. They got our address at an evacuation agency and joined us in Orenburg. We corresponded with my father throughout this time.

The local residents in Pokrovka were very sympathetic with us. They tried to help with whatever they could. However, there was a constant flow of people coming into evacuation. The population of Pokrovka became 40 times bigger than it originally was. Life was getting very hard. There wasn't enough food, so it became very expensive. Some people had money or valuables with them, which they could sell to buy food at the market. The local population was poor. Gradually their warmth towards those in evacuation faded and they developed open hatred towards us. They blamed those that had come to the village for the change of the situation. Besides, anti-Semitism was demonstrated by other nationalities that were in evacuation and local residents learned promptly that Jews were to blame for everything negative. I heard the word 'zhyd' [kike] for the first time there. It wasn't said to me; it was said to someone else in the street.

My brother went to the 8th grade, I to the 6th, and my sister to the 1st grade of the only Russian secondary school in Pokrovka. There were numerous Jews in my class. Teachers and other pupils treated us nicely. I studied well and was particularly good at mathematics. My classmate's father, a local, offered me to work part-time at a food factory. I attended classes from 9am to 1pm and then I worked in the sausage shop of the factory. I operated a meat grinder, which was bigger than I. It was hard work. I received a piece of sausage for it. I returned home about midnight. I didn't have time to do my homework. I listened to what the teachers were saying in class, trying to remember as much as possible. I didn't have any problems with physics, mathematics or chemistry. Russian literature and language were more difficult subjects, and I did my homework at school during breaks.

We received bread coupons. Uncle Yankel went to work at the local bakery. The rest of our family received bread coupons for 300 grams of bread per day. Later this rate was gradually reduced. There were various additives in the bread making it sticky and heavy. 300 grams were no more than three slices of bread. We were constantly hungry. My father sent us his officer's certificate for 500 rubles per month. A loaf of bread cost 100 rubles. I cannot imagine how we survived. We had no clothes since we had left all our belongings at home. My mother worked at home, sewing tarpaulin gloves for soldiers at the front. She rented a sewing machine from the owner of the house in which we were staying. My mother was sickly and very weak and sometimes she couldn't work. I

learned how to sew. Perhaps, my work wasn't always perfect, but they accepted it. Sewing a thumb was the most difficult process for me.

Later I discovered other methods of getting food. When I had some spare time I went to the butcher's section at the market where a butcher chopped frozen meat. There were little pieces scattered all around that I picked up and put into my small bag. It took me a few hours to fill the bag. My mother made soup from this meat. My brother and I also went to the fields to pick vegetable leftovers. In winter 1941 we heard that millet was left in a field, 10 kilometers from Pokrovka. My brother and I skied there to look for millet under the snow. On good days we collected 5-10 kilos of millet spikelets that we took to the mill for threshing. We boiled the grains later.

My grandmother died in Pokrovka in the winter of 1942. She was very weak and spent all her time on a bench by the stove. One morning, when I left for school, my grandmother waved her hand, saying goodbye to me as usual. When I came back from school my grandmother was dead. We buried her in the local cemetery. It wasn't a Jewish funeral. None of us observed any Jewish traditions in evacuation, not even my grandmother.

In 1943 we moved to Akbulak [about 400 km south of Orenburg, on the border with Kazakhstan]. Someone had told my mother that life was easier there. Uncle Yankel refused to go with us. Akbulak was a small town with pise- walled houses, located on the edge of a desert. There were sand roads and sand soil in town. There were deep, sweet water lakes near the town. The farm of a formation military unit was based in Akbulak. Regiments were formed for the front there and they needed food. The military farmed a plot of virgin land and grew cabbage, tomatoes and cucumbers. I went to work in an irrigation unit. We made small canals supplying water to the field via a pump. It was hard work. Damp soil stuck to the spade. I worked there throughout the summer. There were malaria mosquitoes. I fell ill with malaria. I had attacks of malaria almost every day. Medication didn't help. Once I fell into a deep, cold lake. I could hardly swim and it was quite an effort to get out of the water. It was a surprise that I never had malaria afterwards.

My brother finished higher secondary school during evacuation. I finished the 9th grade in June 1945. On 9th May 1945 [Victory Day] [16](#) we heard on the radio that Germany had capitulated and that the war was over. We went into the streets. People hugged and kissed each other. Some laughed and some cried. In the evening the military let off fireworks. An orchestra played in the main square. People danced and sang. It was time to think about life in peace. We weren't quite sure about what to do next. Our house in Korosten was ruined, but we missed home. So we left for Korosten in July 1945. Yankel was already there. He had settled down in an abandoned house. We moved in with him. My father demobilized from the army in the fall of 1945 and came home.

Post-war

My brother went to Kiev where he entered Kiev Food Industry College. I went to the 10th grade at school. My sister Tsylia also went to school. I was the best in class at mathematics. About 70% of my classmates were Jews. During the war almost all Jews from Korosten were in evacuation or at the front. About ten Jewish families stayed in Korosten and they were shot by the fascists.

We lived with my uncle for about a year. Then my father heard that the Polish population of Lviv was leaving for Poland and that vacant apartments were available. My parents and my younger

sister left for Lviv and I stayed in Korosten to finish the 10th grade. My father became the chief accountant at the mechanic plant in Lviv. Polish families left their apartments and furniture. The apartments were rather cheap, but we had no money. My father received a two-bedroom apartment in the housing district for workers in Lviv. There was also a kitchen in this apartment. My brother finished his first year at college and got a transfer to the Faculty of Chemistry at Lviv Polytechnic University. My parents observed Jewish traditions and celebrated Jewish holidays in Lviv. My father couldn't go to the synagogue, though. He wasn't a party member, but he was chief accountant and couldn't openly demonstrate his religiosity. My mother baked matzah at home for Pesach, and my father conducted the first seder according to all laws. On Yom Kippur we fasted. My father celebrated Soviet holidays at work. We didn't celebrate them at home.

After finishing the 10th grade, five of my classmates and I decided to enter Leningrad Navy Academy. We were tempted by the beautiful uniforms that the cadets were wearing. We mailed our application forms via a military registry office and received invitation letters for entrance exams and free tickets to Leningrad. When we arrived we were given uniforms and got accommodation in the hostel. Before the exams we had to have a medical examination including X-ray. The doctors looked at my X-ray and told me to go in for a TB test the following day. They said I had a dark patch in my lungs. The test proved to be negative, but I was to spend a month in hospital. My friends passed their exams successfully, while I wasn't allowed to take mine.

When I heard that the doctors suspected that I had tuberculosis, I left the hospital and walked away from there. I knew it was a lethal disease. I didn't know whether I had years or months to live... They couldn't diagnose my condition in the hospital and sent me to be examined at the Military Medical Academy. There was an old professor who said that there was no dark patch in my lungs. He said it was only a shadow of a splinter in my back that got there at the beginning of the war. I was happy to hear that I had no tuberculosis, but I was upset that admission to the Navy Academy was over. They told me to come again next year.

I went back to Lviv. My brother talked me into entering Lviv Polytechnic University where he was studying. I passed all entrance exams within five days and was admitted to the Faculty of Geodesy. After finishing the first year of my studies I continued my studies at the Faculty of Food Industry.

I enjoyed studying at university and received a stipend for advanced students throughout my studies. I joined the Komsomol [17](#) when I was a 1st- year student. There were a few Jewish students in my group and there were Jewish lecturers at the university. Anti-Semitism was quite openly expressed after World War II, but I didn't face any personally. In 1948 the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [18](#) began. Actually, all 'cosmopolitans' happened to be of Jewish origin. Newspapers published lists of cosmopolitans and if there was a Russian pseudonym of an actor or writer there was always an original Jewish name written in brackets. I don't know whether any Jewish professors were fired from the university. All I can say is that nothing of this kind happened at our faculty.

I finished college in 1951 and got a mandatory job assignment [19](#) to work as a production engineer at a distillery in the small village of Hlyboka, about 20 kilometers from Chernovtsy. The plant was under construction then. The chief engineer of this plant had been arrested shortly before I arrived. The plant was ready for commission, but it couldn't be completed without a chief engineer. Therefore, I was appointed chief engineer. I received a room in the hostel of the distillery. I was

reluctant to take the position and tried to explain to the management that I didn't have any relevant experience. They convinced me to take the job by promising that I would get all necessary support, but actually I got none. It took me a whole year to learn the specifics of the production process: I learned it from production engineers, workers and read manuals. The actual production process is very different from what one learns in college. This distillery became one of the best enterprises in the country. We incorporated a number of modifications and changed the production process. Engineers from all over the Soviet Union came to study at our enterprise. I was the chief engineer there for seven years.

I was in Hlyboka during the Doctors' Plot [20](#). I remember an article in a newspaper entitled 'Murderers in white robes'. Perhaps, there was some distrust with doctors, but I never had any problems in that regard. When Stalin died I felt great sorrow and so did many people in the USSR. We couldn't imagine life without Stalin. It was only after I heard the speech of Nikita Khrushchev [21](#) at the Twentieth Party Congress [22](#) that I understood how many crimes had been committed during this time. Somehow I believed what Khrushchev said at once.

My older brother Abram finished college in 1949. He became a chemical production engineer for non-organic substances. When in college he was seeing his group mate Lilia Medvedeva. Lilia was Russian and our parents didn't want them to get married. Abram and Lilia got job assignments in Salavat in Bashkiria. They got married there. My parents didn't know about this marriage until 1955, when their older daughter Irina was born. They had to resign because of this. My brother's second daughter, Olga, was born in 1957. My brother was chemical water purification manager at a refinery. He was exposed to hazardous substances which had an impact on his health condition. He moved to the town of Burshtyn in Ivano-Frankovsk region [480 km south-west of Kiev] with his family in 1973. One of the biggest power plants in the European part of the USSR was located in this town. My brother and his wife worked there until they retired. Their older daughter Irina is a production engineer. She works at the same plant. Olga is a teacher. She also lives in Burshtyn. Both sisters are married and have children. Olga's husband is deputy director of the power plant. My brother's wife died recently, in 2003. He lives in Burshtyn.

My father retired in 1962 at the age of 60. My parents could now openly celebrate Jewish holidays at home. They continued to live in Lviv for a few more years. When they got older their health condition required somebody to take care of them and they moved to Burshtyn. They exchanged their apartment in Lviv for an apartment close to Abram's. After they moved to Burshtyn my father began to go to the synagogue on Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My mother died in 1978 and my father died in 1982. They were buried in the Jewish section of the town cemetery in Burshtyn. There was no Jewish funeral though.

My younger sister Tsylia wanted to study at Lviv Business College but failed at the exams. She passed her exams to Kuibyshev Business College and was admitted. After finishing college my sister returned to Lviv where she met her future husband, Evgeni Rabinovich, a Jewish man, a professional military. He was a captain and served in a military unit in Lviv. They didn't have a Jewish wedding. Their son Yuri was born in 1959. Evgeni moved from one location to another and my sister and their son followed him. My sister couldn't find a job since she was always on the move. In 1984 Evgeni demobilized and they settled down in Kharkov. Evgeni worked as a guard in a design institute. He understood that there were hardly any perspectives for him or his son to have a better life here [in Ukraine] and they moved to Nurnberg, Germany, in 1994. My sister and

her husband were pensioners. They received accommodation and a pension. Yuri is an engineer in a company. My sister died in Germany in 2002. I don't know if her family observed Jewish traditions in Germany. And, unfortunately, I don't know if Tsyliya had a Jewish funeral either.

Married life

I got married in 1954. I met my wife on a train on the Chernovtsy-Lviv route when I was traveling to visit my parents in Lviv during vacation. There was this Jewish girl and I liked her at once. She was sitting beside me and we started a conversation. We exchanged contacts. Some time later I went to see her when I came to Chernovtsy on business. We went for a walk and to the cinema. I met her family. Then I began to travel to Chernovtsy on weekends. We were dating for nine months before we decided to get married.

My wife's name was Riva Brukental. She was born in 1932 in Lipkany. [It was in Romania then but in 1940 it became part of the USSR and presently it is in Moldova.] Riva's father, Leiba Brukental, was a cabinet-maker at a woodworking plant. Her mother, Sophia Brukental, was a housewife. Riva's parents were very religious. Riva was the youngest in the family. Her older brother, Victor, was born in 1925, and her sister, Etia, was born in 1928. Her family was in the ghetto in the town of Bar near Vinnitsa [72 km south- west of Vinnitsa, 273 km from Kiev] from 1941 to 1944. They had a very hard life in the ghetto, but they all survived. After the war Riva's family moved to Chernovtsy where they settled down in an abandoned house. They were very poor. After finishing school Riva tried to enter medical college twice, but failed. She finished the Chernovtsy Financial College and worked as an accountant.

Riva and I went to Lviv before our wedding. My parents were happy that I was marrying a Jewish girl. They liked Riva at once. We had our wedding in Chernovtsy. We had a civil ceremony and then a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah, traditional Jewish songs and dances at Riva's home. My parents came to the wedding from Lviv, and my brother and his wife came from Bashkiria. My mother's sister Hana and her husband also came. After the wedding we stayed in Chernovtsy for several days. Then we left for Hlyboka. We received another room and my wife went to work as an accountant at the distillery. Our only son, Victor, was born in 1956. My parents and Riva's parents came to the circumcision ritual. After the brit milah Riva's mother talked Riva into visiting them in Chernovtsy. I still feel sorry that I agreed to her going on this trip. On the way back to Hlyboka, Riva and our son got into a car accident. Riva only had minor injuries, but our son had a concussion, which resulted in epilepsy.

I got transferred to Uzhhorod in 1958. I was chief engineer of a distillery. Our family got two rooms near the plant. In 1961 the plant built a house with four apartments. We received one of these apartments, which consisted of two big rooms, a hallway and a kitchen. That's where I still live now. I quit my job at the plant in 1968 and began to work as a production engineer at the regional consumer association. I became chief engineer there in 1973. In 1988 I became chief engineer in the bakery factory where I was paid a higher salary. This was an important factor for the pension that I would receive later. I retired in 1989, but I wasn't used to sitting at home. My acquaintances offered me a job as a garage manager at the plant. I worked there for two years and then I changed jobs and became the maintenance manager at the communications equipment yard. I finally retired in 2002. I've never faced any anti-Semitism. I held managerial posts and I never heard any wicked or unkind word. Perhaps, I was just lucky in my life.

I wasn't a member of the Communist Party. When I worked in Hlyboka, the secretary of the party organization offered me to join the Party. He said that it was a must for a chief engineer. I submitted my application. At the meeting, where they were discussing my admission, the KGB manager, who was also a member of the bureau of the district party committee, said, 'I suggest that we abstain from admission'. That was it. Nobody ever offered any explanation to me. I never resubmitted my application. I just didn't need it. I had a successful career although I wasn't a party member. I was always invited to attend party review meetings. I've never regretted not being a party member.

My wife couldn't find a job. An acquaintance of mine, who was an instructor in the town party committee, helped her to get a job with a car maintenance company. She didn't keep this job for long. She fell ill with asthma and her doctor told her that gasoline vapor was too bad for her health. I talked with the industrial manager of the town party committee whom I had met at a review meeting. He helped Riva to get a job at the financial department of the party committee, and from there she went to work at the tax agency. She liked her job and improved her skills by attending various training courses. Riva was very honest when it came to performing her duties. Sometimes my acquaintances asked me to talk to her so that they would have their taxes reduced or penalties canceled, but I was afraid to even mention anything like that to her. She never did anything illegal.

Riva was raised religiously. She spoke Yiddish in her family. I didn't quite remember Yiddish and we spoke Russian at home and only switched to Yiddish when we didn't want our son to understand the subject of our discussion. We couldn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home due to my position. However, we celebrated Pesach. Riva's parents sent us matzah from Chernovtsy. Riva cooked traditional Jewish food. This was the only Jewish holiday that we always celebrated.

Most of our friends were Jews. We celebrated Soviet holidays and birthdays at home. My wife cooked and we bought good wine. When we were younger we used to sing, dance and tell funny stories at our parties. We spent our vacations together. We spent two weeks visiting Riva's and my parents, and we went to the Crimea or Transcarpathia for the remaining two weeks. My wife and I worked a lot. I always came home late. I was exhausted and almost immediately went to bed. I always rested on weekends. I got up later, read newspapers and magazines and we went to the cinema or theater in the evening.

My son had problems with his studies. This was mainly due to his injury. I understood that it wasn't because he was lazy and didn't force him to study. After finishing school Victor tried to enter a technical school, but failed at the exams. We decided to stop trying and he went to work as a laborer at a printing house. He got married in 1984. Victor's wife, Ludmila Teplitskaya, was a Jew. Her parents moved to Uzhhorod after World War II. Victor and Ludmila didn't have a Jewish wedding. My granddaughter, Natalia, was born in 1986. Unfortunately, my son's marriage failed. They divorced in 1990. Ludmila, her daughter and her parents moved to Israel in 1992. Ludmila died in Israel in 1998. Her parents and our granddaughter returned to Ukraine. They live in Melitopol in the Crimea. My son supports his daughter. Sometimes she spends her vacations with us. Natalia finished school last summer. Unfortunately, we cannot support her to continue her studies. I don't know what Natalia plans to do in the future. Victor is a storekeeper in Hesed now. I help him when he has to make food packages.

Many of our friends moved to Israel in the 1970s. We didn't consider this option since my wife and I both suffered from asthma and doctors didn't recommend such a dramatic change of climate. However, we sympathized with those that decided to move and were always happy to hear that they managed well in their new country.

My wife died in 2002. Her colleagues and friends came to the funeral. People liked her. We arranged a Jewish funeral and buried Riva in the Jewish cemetery in Uzhhorod. Two rabbis from Israel, who visited Hesed at the time, conducted the ritual. They came to the cemetery. Almost all people came to the funeral with flowers. Jews don't bring flowers to a funeral, but those people didn't know about it. It's been almost a year that I've been going to the synagogue to recite the Kaddish for my wife. I don't know Hebrew and get a copy of the prayer printed in Russian letters. I didn't go to the synagogue before my wife died. I didn't believe in such things and didn't like it. It's too late to change one's convictions. I cannot say that I have faith, but I do read the Kaddish. I have to do it for a year.

When perestroika [23](#) began in the late 1980s I felt no enthusiasm. I still believe that we had a better life before perestroika. I'm old and won't live to see the promised bright future - if it ever comes. Plants and factories were shut down, people lost their jobs and didn't have means to support their families. Therefore, I felt negative about perestroika from the very beginning. Of course, Gorbachev [24](#) gave a start for democracy. Why did they have to spoil it afterwards and destroy the country?

There has been one positive change since Ukraine became independent: the Jewish way of life has revived. In 1999 Hesed was founded in Uzhhorod and now Russians feel envious of Jews. Hesed takes care of old people. They deliver hot meals to our homes. We also receive food packages. We receive monthly allowances to buy medication. We get medical care and, in case we need medical aid, we can go to hospital and have free medical examinations there. However, I don't think this will last forever. America and Israel cannot provide assistance to us forever.

The attitude towards Jews has also changed. Jews are free to go to the synagogue now, which they couldn't do before perestroika. We celebrate Jewish holidays in the former synagogue that houses the Philharmonic now. There was a great celebration at Chanukkah. Ten cars with electric Chanukkah candles on the roofs drove across the town in the evening. It was very beautiful. This wasn't possible in the past. There are beautiful celebrations of Jewish holidays now and nobody forbids them. They attract young people, too, which is good.

Glossary

[1](#) Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during 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.

[2](#) 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.

3 Civil War (1918-1920)

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

4 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.

5 Jewish Pale of Settlement

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

6 Pogroms in Ukraine

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

7 Gangs

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

8 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)

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

9 Common name

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

10 Russian stove

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

11 Struggle against religion

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

12 Elijah, the Prophet

According to Jewish legend the prophet Elijah visits every home on the first day of Pesach and drinks from the cup that has been poured for him. He is invisible but he can see everything in the house. The door is kept open for the prophet to come in and honor the holiday with his presence.

13 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.

14 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.

15 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.

16 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

17 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.

18 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained

ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

19 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

20 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.

21 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.

22 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.

23 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

24 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

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