

# Baby Pisetskaya

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ada Goldferb

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Baby Pisetskaya, an old gray-haired woman of average stature lives alone in a two-bedroom apartment on the 9th floor in a new building in a new district called Kotovski, about 20 kilometers from Odessa city center. There was a fire in the building back in 1992, while she was in hospital. Her apartment was severely damaged and there are still pieces of wallpaper hanging from the walls, broken tiles on the floor and cracked ceilings. All furniture, but a wardrobe and a floor mirror, burned during the fire. Few books were spared by the fire. Now there are a few pieces of old furniture some relatives gave Baby that they failed to sell before moving abroad. The plant where Baby had worked, also gave her a few pieces of furniture. Within the past ten years Baby lost her two children: her son Vladimir perished during the fire and her daughter Flora died in 2002. Despite her dispirited condition Baby talked very vividly about the life of her family that was once big and close to her.

My paternal grandfather Menachem-Nuchem Pisetski was born to a wealthy family in Odessa in 1878. I know for sure that my grandfather had a sister and a brother. His brother Max lived in London. I don't know how he happened to get there, but I remember that he always sent us parcels with matzah before Pesach. The boxes were labeled 'kosher le-Pesach' ['kosher for Pesach' in Hebrew]. He also sent tea and fabrics from there. I have no information about my grandfather's sister Rachil. My grandfather told me that his family was very religious: they followed the kashrut and observed all Jewish holidays. My grandfather attended cheder. Since my grandfather was a tailor he went to the synagogue for tailors located in Remeslennaya Street in the center of Odessa. Shlyoma Karasyov, my maternal great-grandfather, worked as a shammash in that synagogue. Most likely, it was my great-grandfather Shlyoma who introduced my grandfather to my grandmother.

My grandmother Riva-Zelda Pisetskaya, nee Karasyova, was one year older than my grandfather. She was born in Odessa in 1877. My grandmother's sister Minia was married to Chaim Berinski, a tailor. Minia, her husband and their three children Motl, Favel and Chovele were killed by fascists in Odessa in 1941, during the Great Patriotic War [1](#). Their older son Misha, who was at the front, was the only survivor in their family. After the war Misha lived in Sverdlovsk. My grandmother also had another brother: Iosif Karasyov who lived in Uspenskaya Street in the center of town with his wife and three children: Mera, Beba and Naum. I know that they lived a long life in Odessa. My grandmother and grandfather got married in 1898. They had a happy marriage: in the first three years their first three children were born: Yakov, my father Fridel and Betia.

In 1905 my grandfather, grandmother and their three children moved to Uman, a small provincial town in the west of Ukraine, escaping from the terrible Odessa pogrom [2](#) that year. [Uman was a district town in Kiev province; according to the poll of 1897 the population of Uman was 31,016 and

17,945 of them were Jews.] Uman was located in the Volyn-Podolsk Hills on the banks of the Umanka and Kamenka Rivers. It was a small town with one- storied buildings. There was a substantial Jewish population in the town at the beginning of the 20th century. They were involved in commerce and crafts. There were tailors, barbers and shoemakers among the Jewish population. There were a few synagogues and a shochet in town. There is a popular park called Sophievka in Uman, it was founded by Count Felix Pototsky at the end of the 18th century.

My grandfather bought a big and beautiful house with columns in the center of the town and opened a garment shop. His clients were wealthy ladies. There was a big room in the front part of the house where my grandfather received his clients. It also served as a shop as such; there were assistant tailors sitting at their desks, mannequins and two sewing machines in this same room. The next room was a big living room where our family got together at Sabbath and on Jewish holidays. There was a big table covered with a velvet tablecloth with tassels, chairs and a big oak cupboard with fancy china in it. On holidays we ate from this china crockery with silver tableware: forks, knives and spoons. There were eight rooms altogether in the house. My grandfather sold two of them to a confectioner called Galetka, maybe for his business, who owned an ice-cream cafe across the street from the town garden. There were annex buildings near the house that were leased to some Jews.

I remember my grandfather very well: he was of average height, baldish, had a moustache, but no beard. My grandmother was very beautiful; she had very thick long hair that she combed with a metal comb. She wore a lace shawl. She also wore hats. My grandparents had six more children in Uman. In total, they had nine children. They were all raised religiously and spoke Yiddish. All boys studied in cheder and the girls were educated at home.

My father's older brother Yakov was born in Odessa in 1899. In 1917, after the October Revolution [see Russian Revolution of 1917] [3](#). Yakov was attracted by communist ideas. He became a communist. He married Milia, a Jewish girl, in Uman. They moved to Kharkov in 1920. They weren't religious. Yakov worked in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee - I don't have any details about the position he held there. His daughter Luba was born in 1920 and his second daughter Flora followed in 1924. During the Great Patriotic War they were all evacuated to Tashkent [today Uzbekistan]. Uncle Yakov was released from military service since the thumb of his right hand was deformed.

After the war the family returned to Kharkov. Their older daughter Luba and her husband Michael Gorwitz moved to Kiev. Her husband was a chief architect in Kiev. They had two children. Michael died in the 1970s and Luba and her son moved to Luba's daughter in Moscow. Yakov's younger daughter Flora was single. She lived with her parents in Kharkov. Uncle Yakov died in 1988 and aunt Milia passed away shortly afterwards. After her parents died Aunt Flora moved to her sister Luba in Moscow. Luba, her children and their families and Flora moved to Austria in 1998. That's all the information I have about them.

My father's sister Betia was born in Odessa in 1903. She married a Jewish shoemaker called Pinchus Skliar in 1924. They lived in a room in my grandfather's house: Pinchus made shoes and there was always the smell of leather in their room. Their son Syoma was born in 1925. In 1929 they moved to Odessa where their daughter Rosa was born in 1937. Betia's husband went to the front in 1941. He perished that same year. Betia, her children and my grandparents evacuated to

Tashkent.

After the war Betia returned to Odessa with her children. They lived in Uspenskaya Street in the center of town. Aunt Betia died in 1978. Betia's son Syoma got married. His wife Fira was a Jew. They both worked, but I don't have any information about their jobs. Syoma died in 1971. His daughter Rosa married Misha Zelener, a Jewish man. In the late 1950s their two children were born: a boy and a girl. Rosa and her family moved to Germany in the 1990s.

My father's younger brother Semyon was born in Uman in 1905. He married Rosa, a Jewish girl, in 1925. I don't know what he did for a living. He and Rosa lived across the street from where we lived. Their son Mitia was born in 1927 and Lyolia followed in 1929. In 1932 they moved to Moscow. During the Great Patriotic War Semyon was at the front and his wife and their children were in Moscow. Semyon returned home after the war. He died after an eye surgery in the late 1970s. There happened to be a tumor in his eye. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Moscow. Rosa died in the 1980s in Moscow and is buried near her husband.

Their son Mitia was the director of the photo laboratory of Moscow State University. His wife's name was Ida. She was a Jew. They had children and grandchildren. There was a tragic accident in their family: their daughter gave her child a pill, the child choked and died. Mitia's daughter moved somewhere abroad. I don't know where exactly she moved to. Mitia died in 1999. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Moscow. Lyolia went in for weight lifting. He was a coach at the sports association called Spartak. Lyolia was married to Rosa. They had children and grandchildren. Lyolia died recently, sometime around 2000, but I don't know when exactly. I don't know where he was buried, either. His wife Rosa died a long while ago. Lyolia's daughter lives in Germany.

My father's younger sister Manya was born in Uman in 1907. She married David Kalika in 1929. David was the son of the chazzan of the Berla Kalika synagogue in Uman. Manya and David moved to Kharkov in 1930. David worked at the Kharkov tractor plant. They had two children: Busia and Arkadi. During the Great Patriotic War David, his wife and children evacuated to Tashkent where they survived the war. David Kalika's family perished in Uman. When the Germans came to Uman they lined up all Jews in a column headed by Lusik Brozer, the retarded son of the pharmacist, who carried a red flag. The Germans forced David's brother Samuel, a Jewish actor, to sing a song and the Jews marched to the spot where they were shot. They were killed near the railway station. We got to know this from our neighbors in the 1960s.

After the war Manya and David stayed in Tashkent. David died in Tashkent in 1972 and Manya died in 1977. Their daughter Busia finished a college of foreign languages and became an English teacher. She married an Uzbek man who became a professor at polytechnic college. Their daughter Rimma died of brain growth in 1987. Busia moved to the USA in 1990. Her husband stayed in Tashkent. Busia's brother Arkadi died of a heart attack in Tashkent in 1976. He had a wife Nelia and a daughter Marina. Marina got married and had a son. She died at the age of 21, when her son was three years old. Nelia, Arkadi's widow, and her grandson moved to the USA.

My father's younger brother Izia was born in Uman in 1909. Izia served in the army in Nikolaev. I remember that my grandmother visited him there. After he returned home Izia got married. His wife was Jewish. Her name was Manya. They lived in Odessa. They had three children: the oldest, Beba, was born in 1930, and the twins Polia and Sopha were born in 1937. They said in the family that Izia finished the Mikhoels [4](#) drama school and worked at the Jewish Theater in Odessa. During

the Great Patriotic War he was at the front. He had many decorations. Manya and her children were in evacuation in Tashkent.

After the war they returned to Odessa. Izia worked at the Jewish Theater until it was closed in 1948. Izia went to work at the Philharmonic. In 1953, during the time of the Doctors' Plot [5](#), he was arrested as an 'enemy of the people' [6](#) and sentenced to ten years in Norilsk, Krasnoyarsk region. He was released after five years of imprisonment when Khrushchev [7](#) came to power. He had all his war decorations returned to him [see Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union] [8](#). The authorities sent him to a recreation center for two months to improve his health. After returning from exile he went to work as administrator with the Odessa Philharmonic. He died in 1971. His wife Manya and her daughters Beba, Polia and Sopha moved to the USA in the late 1970s. Manya and Sopha have already died and I've lost contact with the others.

My father's sister Ida was born in Uman in 1911. She finished a secondary school. She moved to Odessa with my grandfather in 1929. In 1935 she married Isaac Konstantinovski, a Jewish man. Their daughter Sopha was born in 1936. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War Isaac went to the front and perished. Ida and her daughter Sopha evacuated to Tashkent. After the war Ida worked as a shop assistant in a food store until the elderly age of 81. Her daughter Sopha was married and had two children. Aunt Ida died in 1993. Sopha died of diabetes in 1999.

My father's younger brother Isaac was born in Uman in 1913. I don't know where he studied or what he did for a living. He lived in Odessa from 1929. He got married before the Great Patriotic War. His wife's name was Riva. They had two children: Gisia and Abrasha. During the war he went to the front where he perished. Riva and the children evacuated to Tashkent. After the war Riva worked at the tea-packing factory in Odessa. I don't know any details about what she was doing there. Gisia married Aby, a Jewish man. They had two sons. After her mother died - I don't know in what year - she, her husband and their children moved to Israel. I have no more information about her. Abrasha was single. He passed away in Odessa. I don't remember when or of what he died.

My father's youngest sister Chaya was born in 1919. She finished a lower secondary school in Odessa. Chaya married Israel Meyerson, a Jewish man, in 1936. They had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah. There was a big wedding party. All her brothers and sisters and their families from Kharkov, Moscow and Kursk came to her wedding in Odessa. The wedding was in my grandparents' home. There was even an article about this wedding in a Jewish newspaper - I don't remember, which newspaper it was, but my father told me that there was even a photo of our family published. Chaya and Israel had a son called Senia. When the Great Patriotic War began Chaya and her family evacuated to Tashkent. Israel went to the front and in 1943 his family received the notification of his death.

After the war Chaya worked in a catering company. My grandparents helped her to raise her son. Her son got married and moved to Baku. Later he emigrated to the USA with his family. He was supposed to take his mother there, but then he divorced his wife and remarried. His mother stayed at home. Chaya was going to move to Israel in the year 2000. She even bought a ticket, but a few days before her departure she died of extensive myocardial infarction.

My father Fridel Pisetski was born in Odessa in 1901. In 1905 he moved to Uman with his parents. He studied in cheder. Then my grandfather sent him to learn the barber's profession. My father was 17 when the October Revolution took place. In 1919 he was mobilized to the Red army. He served

in a military unit that fought against gangs [9](#) in Ukraine. Their unit was near Gaisin where he met his future wife, my mother.

I know little about my maternal grandmother Beila Gabova, nee Yasinova. I don't know where or when she was born or who her parents were. All I know is that she lived in Ternovka, Gaisin district, Podolsk province. My grandmother's brother was a communist. He was the chairman of Ternovka village council and was killed by bandits in his own office in 1919.

My maternal grandfather Yakov Grabov was born in Ternovka in the 1870s. He was a blacksmith. He was religious. He finished cheder. My grandfather was a gabbai at the synagogue. My grandparents got married in 1901. Grandmother gave birth to five children. My grandfather told me that his family followed the kashrut, observed all Jewish holidays and fasted. In 1914 my grandfather Yakov was mobilized to serve in World War I. He was captured by Austrians and spent two years in captivity. He returned home in 1917 and began to build a house with Grandmother Beila.

My grandmother Beila died in Ternovka in 1917. In 1919 my grandfather married Sara, the widow of Grandmother Beila's brother. Grandfather Yakov loved his second wife very much. Sara was a convinced communist and he even got adjusted to her views. Sara had a son from her first marriage: Chaim. She had a daughter Shelia and a son Lyova born from her second marriage with Grandfather Yakov. In the 1930s, when the Jewish autonomous region [Birobidzhan] [10](#) was established, at the initiative of grandmother Sara, they moved to Birobidzhan with their younger children: Rosa, Luba, Shelia and Lyova. They were accommodated in a barrack at first and later they received an apartment. My grandfather was old when they moved and I don't know whether he still worked there. Grandmother Sara went to work, but I don't know any details.

My grandfather didn't tell me about their life in Birobidzhan. I know that their son Lyova drowned before the Great Patriotic War. He was 13. Grandfather Yakov visited us in Kursk. During the war he also visited us in Kazakhstan. After the Great Patriotic War my grandfather and Grandmother Sara moved to Chaim, Sara's son from her first marriage, in Boguslav, Kiev region. Grandfather Yakov died of throat cancer in 1948. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Boguslav. After he died Grandmother Sara and her daughter Shelia moved to Lugansk. She died there at an old age in the 1960s.

My mother's brother Foma was born in Ternovka in 1904. Uncle Foma lived with his Jewish wife Genia in Kursk. Their daughter Asia was born in 1934. They observed all Jewish holidays. Foma and his father-in-law owned a confectionary. He worked as a confectioner until the Great Patriotic War. In late 1941 he and my father went to the front. Foma perished in 1942 and my father saw him dying. His wife Genia and their daughter Asia, born in 1938, evacuated, but I don't know where they were in evacuation. Asia got lost on the way and was sent to a children's home. She was found promptly. After the war they returned to their house in Kursk. Genia worked as a shop assistant after the war. I don't remember when she died. Asia finished the faculty of foreign languages at some pedagogical college. She married a Russian man. They had two sons: Igor and Oleg. Asia and her husband moved to Germany in 2001.

My mother's sister Rachil was born in Ternovka in 1908. She married David Shwartz, a Jewish man, in 1929. They lived in Kzyl-Orda. I don't know what profession Rachil's husband had. Their son Boria was born in 1930, and a few years later they moved to Kursk. Their daughter Ania was born in



1938. Rachil had another son, who died in infancy. Before the war Rachil was selling beer in a kiosk. They observed all Jewish holidays. During the war they evacuated to Tashkent where Rachil's husband died of tuberculosis in 1942. Rachil and her children returned to Kursk after the war and then, in 1948, they moved to Odessa. She worked as a shop assistant in a bakery store in the center of town. I don't remember when Rachil died. Her son Boris and his family left for the USA in 1998. Boris had heart problems and when the plane landed he died at the airport. Rachil's daughter Ania and her family moved to Germany in 1999.

My mother's sister Rosa was born in 1910 as far as I know. Rosa lived in Birobidzhan. She married Michael Olchedoevski there. Michael was at the front during the war. They had two children. Later they all moved to Khabarovsk. I don't know when they died since we didn't communicate with them.

My mother's younger sister Luba was born in 1913. I don't know where she studied. She moved to Birobidzhan with my maternal grandparents. There she married Michael Khotimski, a Jewish man. He was 30 years older than Luba. He finished a grammar school and was the director of a suitcase factory. They didn't have any children. In the early 1930s they moved to Kursk where Luba's husband became the director of a brewery. They had a house in Yamskaya Sloboda in the suburb of the town. Michael's mother lived with them. She was religious and observed all Jewish traditions. When the Great Patriotic War began Luba and her family evacuated to the village of Antonovka, Sarkansk district in Kazakhstan. Luba's mother-in-law died on the way to evacuation. After the Great Patriotic War they returned to Kursk and later they moved to Rostov. Many years later Michael died of throat cancer and Luba moved to Kiev. Her cousin Fima acquainted her with his wife's relative. Luba had diabetes. She had her leg amputated. She died in Kiev in the late 1990s.

My mother's half-sister Shelia was born in 1924. She left for Birobidzhan with her parents. She finished a Jewish school and a college there. She was the director of a shoe factory. After the Great Patriotic War she moved to Boguslav with her parents. Her stepbrother Chaim lived there and worked in a barbershop. He made wigs. Later he moved to Darnitsa in Kiev where he had a house. After my maternal grandfather Yakov died in 1948 Shelia and her mother moved to Lugansk. Shelia still lives there today.

My mother Sonia Grabova was born in Ternovka in 1902, although her documents stated that she was born in 1904. My mother studied in cheder for girls [11](#). She spoke fluent Yiddish. My mother was 15 when Grandmother Beila died, but until then my grandmother managed to teach my mother many things. My mother was good at housekeeping, knew all Jewish traditions and could cook traditional Jewish food. At the age of 17 my mother met my father. This happened near Gaisin in 1919. The Red army military unit in which my father served stopped there. The local population sympathized with the Red army that protected them from bandits. They shared their food, however little they had, with the military. My mother also brought food to this unit.

My parents got married in 1920. They had a Jewish wedding in Uman. After the wedding they moved into my grandfather Menachem's house in Uman. Their son Syoma was born in 1921. My father's military unit was sent to fight with basmach [anti-Soviet rebel in Central Asia, 1920s. Supposedly from Uzbek word, 'basmachi'] gangs in the town of Verny [today Alma-Ata] in Middle Asia. My brother was nine months old when my mother took him to the railway station from where my father was departing. Syoma caught a cold and died of diphtheria. My mother continued living

in Grandfather Menachem's house. She was much loved there. She waited for my father for about three years. My father returned in 1923. Grandfather Menachem was a wealthy man. When my father returned to Uman my grandfather gave him money to buy a barbershop in Sadovaya Street in the center of Uman.

I was born on 16th May 1924 and my younger sister Shelia was born on 13th April 1926. I have bright memories about the years that we spent in Uman. We all lived in Grandfather Menachem's house. Daughters and daughters-in-law helped my grandmother with the cooking, and my grandmother also had housemaids to help her around the house. I remember one called Nastia and another one called Asia; they were Ukrainian girls. The family always got together on Jewish holidays. At Sabbath my mother baked challah. My grandparents had special crockery for Pesach. My grandmother made ground horseradish and cooked geese for the seder. I also remember that at the beginning of the seder at Pesach my grandfather put the afikoman under a pillow and I had to find it. I was too small then to remember more details about it. At Chanukkah my grandfather made little bags into which he put golden coins and hung those bags around our necks.

Grandfather Menachem went to the synagogue regularly. I remember that he put on his tallit and tefillin when he prayed at home. I was five then and remember that I stood beside him and kissed the cubes - tefillin, and my grandfather kissed the edges of his tallit.

There was a hotel near my grandfather's house. It collapsed during an earthquake in 1932. Actors of the Jewish Musical Comedy Theater of Fischson stayed in this hotel when the theater was on tour in Uman. I still have the paper with the advertisement about it. Clara Yung and Beba Yunesca, actresses of this theater, used to rehearse in a big room in my grandfather's house. We had no piano at home and a violinist came with them. I was five years old then and attended all their rehearsals. Then we organized family concerts at home for ourselves where I sang arias from musicals. Our family was fond of music and we always had a lot of fun at home.

In 1929 my grandmother, grandfather and the younger children Izia, Ida, Isaac and Chaya moved to Odessa. By 1929 the NEP [12](#) was almost done with due to galloping taxes that made it impossible to keep smaller stores and shops. There were no other jobs in smaller towns and for this reason my grandparents moved to Odessa where they stayed in a two-bedroom apartment on the first floor in the center of town. My grandfather was a skilled tailor. He had apprentices and numerous clients. When the Great Patriotic War began my grandparents evacuated to Tashkent with their daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

When my grandparents moved to Odessa, we stayed in my grandfather's house. I remember going to the Sophievka park in Uman with my parents and Shelia. My father also took us to Puscha-Voditsa in Kiev where I saw a train for the first time in my life. I went to a Ukrainian school in the center of town in 1930 at the age of six. I became a Young Octobrist [13](#) at this school. In 1933, during the period of the famine [14](#), I fell ill with typhoid. To be able to buy medicines and more food for me, my parents took their silverware to the Torgsin store [15](#). My father had to give his barbershop to the state. He couldn't keep it because of the high taxes. Then my mother had twisted bowels. She had a surgery and had to stay in hospital for a long while. In 1934 my father took my mother to the Kuyalnik [16](#) recreation center in Odessa. My sister Shelia and I stayed with my mother's sisters Rachil and Luba who lived in Kursk.

In 1935 my parents sold their house in Uman and we moved to Kursk. Kursk was an industrial town near Moscow. There were one and two-storied buildings in town. There are two rivers near Kursk: the Seyn and the Tuskar river; and there are mixed woods around the town. Many Jews lived in Kursk before the war. There was a synagogue in town. My parents bought a one- bedroom apartment on the second floor near the railroad spur in the center of town. There was a stove stoked with coal and wood. There was a table and chairs in the center of the room, a big wardrobe with a mirror by the wall and a desk where Shelia and I did our homework. There was also a nickel-plated bed on which my parents slept. There was a screen and two beds behind it where Shelia and I slept. My father was the first one in town to learn to make permanent wave and I remember that his clients - the most elegant women of Kursk - came to our house to have their hair done before holidays.

My sister and I studied in a secondary school. My sister studied French and I studied German at school. We also passed our tests for GTO [ready for labor and defense] and 'Voroshylov [17](#) rifle shooter' badges. I attended an artistic embroidery club and wrote poems. I was a pioneer and attended a club in the House of Pioneers. I sang with a string orchestra. I liked singing and got invitations to sing on the radio and in concerts. Our string orchestra gave concerts at kolkhozes and factories. I sang songs from the repertory of Claudia Shulzhenko. [Claudia Ivanovna Shulzhenko, 1906-1984, a Soviet pop singer, whose name is associated with the start of Soviet pop singing.] In 1939 I took part in the children's radio festival dedicated to the 22nd anniversary of the October Revolution where I was awarded the first prize. I still have this award. There were newspaper publications about me and I kept these articles. In 1939, when the Finnish campaign [see Soviet-Finnish War] [18](#) began, our school was transformed into a hospital and we moved to another school. We gave concerts in hospitals.

In 1940 I was awarded a trip to Sochi on the Black Sea for my successful studies. I went with Abdulla Yusupov, a Tatar boy from another school. This was an unforgettable tour: we went mountaineering and bathed in the sea. We had bus tours to the towns of Adler and Chosta. We went to places of interest and took a drive on the funicular.

Shelia and I had many Jewish and Russian friends. We didn't care about nationality: there was no anti-Semitism in Kursk before the war. My sister and I and our friends went to swim in the river, celebrated Soviet holidays and went to parades. There were many gatherings in our apartment. My friends from the orchestra visited me. We sang, danced and had a lot of fun.

We observed the main Jewish holidays in the family of my mother's sister Luba, whose husband was the director of a brewery. They had a big house that could easily accommodate all members of our big family: my mother's brother Foma, his wife Genia and daughter Asia, Aunt Rachil, her husband David and their children, Boris and Ania, and us. At Pesach my mother baked matzah, cooked gefilte fish and chicken broth and made keyzele [matzah pudding], and brought it all to Luba. We spent the seder, led by Luba's husband Michael, all together.

I joined the Komsomol [19](#) when I was in the 10th grade. I finished school with honors in 1941. On 21st June 1941 we had a prom. According to school traditions we went for a walk in the woods after the prom. On 22nd June we heard that the Great Patriotic War had begun. I managed to submit my documents to Voronezh Aviation College and was admitted without exams. Schools in Kursk were transformed into hospitals. Our orchestra gave concerts in hospitals and to the military units



leaving for the front. I sang the 'Katyusha' song by Blanter, which was always a big success. [Blanter, Matvey Isaacovich, 1903-1991, popular Soviet composer.] At one of those concerts Blanter gave me the notes of this song.

One night in November 1941 we were moving toward the front line. It was cold and dark when all of a sudden rockets lit our column and German planes began to drop metal barrels on us. One barrel fell onto my legs and I fainted. When I regained consciousness, it turned out that I had a fracture of a cannon bone in one leg and a bruise on another leg. I was taken to a hospital in Kursk where I had a cast applied on my leg and another leg was fixed on a support. My ward was on the second floor. At night the first bombardment of Kursk began. I was thrown into the corridor by the blast wave. All other patients were running downstairs and nobody paid any attention to me. Then another patient grabbed me and dragged me outside where we found shelter in a trench. We stayed there until morning. When I was taken back to my ward on stretches I heard that many people had been killed or wounded that night.

In late 1941 my father and my mother's brother Foma went to the front. I had got a little better by then and my mother and aunts began to prepare for evacuation. There were freight carriages for transportation of horses on the railroad spur. Our neighbors helped us to clean up all manure from one carriage. I was taken there on stretches and my mother, my sister Shelia, Aunt Luba, her husband and his mother, Aunt Rachil and her children also got into this carriage. We reached Kuibyshev [present-day Samara]. The trip was long and exhausting. There were air raids and many carriages burnt down.

In Kuibyshev we changed trains and moved on. At one station my mother got off the train to get some food when our train moved to another track. We got so scared that my mother wouldn't find us when the train moved back and all ended well. Aunt Luba's mother-in-law died on the way. She was old and traveling was too much for her. We reached Maaly station in Alma-Ata region, Kazakhstan. Representatives of authorities inspected the train to identify the wounded or ill passengers. I and a distant relative of ours were taken on a truck to a hospital in Sarkand on the border with China. I saw Kazakh people, mountains topped with snow, beautiful landscapes and a donkey for the first time in my life. My mother, sister and other relatives were taken to a kolkhoz [20](#) in the village of Antonovka. My mother was very worried that I was in a different place, but when I got better I was released from hospital and joined my family. My mother and other relatives did miscellaneous work in the kolkhoz. Luba's husband Michael was a secretary at the village council. Besides, he was responsible for aryk wells. When I came to Antonovka I was given two bulls and a wagon to transport kok-sagyz [a plant] - raw material for rubber manufacturing. We got lodging in a house and the local population treated us nicely, but I could hardly bear the local climate and was allergic to water.

In 1942 my father got into encirclement. He was wounded and was lying on a cart when a German soldier shot him into his belly. The bullet got stuck in his pelvis. At that moment a cannon shell exploded nearby. The horses got scared and bolted off. This saved my father's life. When his military unit got out of this encirclement my father got into hospital. He was treated in Makhachkala and then transferred to Kirovograd. When he recovered he was demobilized from the army.

My father got our address from our relatives who lived in Moscow during the Great Patriotic War and then he came to Antonovka. He worked in a shop that made valenki boots [traditional Russian felt boots] for the front. To refresh my knowledge of school subjects I went to the 10th grade at the local school for the second time. My sister Shelia also went to the local school. There was a frontier military unit near the village where we stayed and they began to invite me to give concerts to the military. The military helped me to find out via the evacuation agency in Buguruslan that my college was evacuated to Tashkent. [Editor's note: The evacuation agency in Buguruslan, Orenburg region, was an inquiry office that collected information about people, institutions and enterprises.] My father's parents Riva and Menachem and their children were in evacuation there. Uzbek people were very friendly with those who came to their towns during evacuation. I arrived in Tashkent in 1942. I passed my exams for the first year of studies at college and became a 2nd-year student at the Faculty of Aircraft Building. I attended classes and in the evening my fellow students and I unloaded bread. My parents sent me parcels with food every now and then.

In 1943 Kursk was liberated and my father came to Tashkent to pick me up. I finished three years in college. The villagers liked my mother a lot. She was awarded a piglet for her good work. We returned to Kursk within a month after it was liberated. There were other tenants in our apartment and there were no belongings left. We turned to the court and were issued a positive decision. We moved back into our apartment. I began to work in the Paris Commune shop.

In late 1943 the district Komsomol committee gave me the task to teach people about defense of chemical weapons. I lived in Prokhorovka station in the building that housed the telegraph office during the Kursk battle [21](#). I didn't really have time to do any training. There were anti-tank mines everywhere and I followed field engineers clearing fields from mines and installing signs saying 'clear of mines'. Then women wearing worn out clothes and bast shoes came onto the fields to plough the soil covered with many splinters from cannon shells. I stayed there until late 1944. After returning to Kursk I worked as a corrector with Kurskaya Pravda [Kursk Truth], a Soviet daily newspaper, and studied in an evening music school. I was an active Komsomol member and was elected as a delegate to the 3rd district conference of the Komsomol in Kursk.

In 1944 I married Pavel Glukhov, a Russian man. He was born in Ulianovsk. He was one year older than I. He finished a flying school and went to the front. He was wounded in 1943 and sent to hospital in Kursk where I met him. After we got married he continued to serve in his Air Force military unit. I remember, that when I was pregnant my mother forced me to fast at Yom Kippur: my parents continued to observe some Jewish traditions. My son Vladimir was born on 21st January 1946. We named him after Vladimir Illich Lenin since that year was an anniversary of his death. 1946 was a difficult year: there was a lack of food in the country. As a corrector with the Kurskaya Pravda newspaper, I received food coupons. In 1947 my husband and I separated - he was a womanizer. I haven't heard about him ever since.

Life was hard in Kursk after the war. There were many criminal gangs in the town; one of them was called 'Black Cat'. In June 1947 my father, mother, my sister Shelia, my son and I moved to Odessa to my father's grandparents Menachem-Nuchem and Riva-Zelda. We lived in a small two-bedroom apartment on the first floor of a house in the center of town. There was an outside toilet in the yard near our apartment. My father's brother Izia and his family lived with us. Grandfather and grandmother lived with their daughter Ida in her prewar apartment in Ostrovidova Street in the center of town. My father's younger sister Chaya and her son Senia lived there, too.

My father went to work as a barber. He was chairman of the barbers' guild. Our district Komsomol committee appointed me as deputy director at the recreation center of the Kinap plant, but it was a seasonal job. In 1948 I went to work at the Sanitas shop that manufactured lighters, powder compacts, cigarette cases and other haberdashery. I was a stamp operator. In this shop I met my second husband Misha Tetelman, a Jewish man.

Misha was born in Voznesensk, Nikolaev region, in 1914. He was ten years older than I and he wasn't religious at all. Misha was an engraver, but he had a job as a press operator in this shop. During the war he was a tank man at the front. I don't know exactly in what location at the front he was, but he had many decorations.

We got married in 1948. We had a civil wedding. By that time my father had bought an apartment in the basement of the house where Aunt Ida lived. There were two rooms, a kitchen and a big hallway in this apartment. My husband and I lived there with my parents. There was a stove stoked with coal and wood. It was hard to buy anything in stores after the war. My mother made curtains with frills from gauze to somehow decorate the apartment.

My daughter Flora was born in 1949. I quit my job to take care of the children. We were a big and nice family. My grandfather, grandmother, aunt Ida and aunt Chaya lived in the same building and we saw each other frequently. Besides, all our relatives who lived in Odessa came to celebrate Soviet and Jewish holidays and birthdays with us. My mother and I cooked delicious food. We often had guests and life was fun. We helped and supported each other. When our relatives' children were getting married we went to their wedding parties.

However little space we had to live we supported and helped each other. My grandfather was rather old, but he continued sewing. He still had many private clients. My grandmother did all the housekeeping. On Jewish holidays they put on their fancy clothes and went to the synagogue. My grandmother had a brain tumor, but she ignored it for a long time. It turned out to be malignant. My grandmother Riva died in 1953. She had a Jewish funeral and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. Since neither my father nor Uncle Izia could pray there was a man invited to recite the Kaddish and my mother sat shivah. After my grandmother died I began to escort my grandfather to the synagogue. My mother stayed at home to look after the children. My grandfather took his tallit and tefillin in a bag to the synagogue with him. In 1954 my grandfather got into a car accident when crossing a street alone. He died. He had a Jewish funeral and was buried near my grandmother's grave. The Kaddish was recited by a Jew invited from the Jewish cemetery.

On 5th March 1953 Stalin died. I was raised in Stalin's era. I was a member of the Komsomol and believed in Stalin enormously. I grieved a lot after him.

My sister Shelia finished a course of post office employees after the war. Then she took a course of advanced training in Kishinev. She was head of department of mail shipments at the Central Post Office in Odessa. Shelia remained single for a long time. In 1962 she went to visit my father's younger brother Semyon in Moscow and he acquainted her with his co-tenant Boris Rodinski. Boris was Russian. They got married and in 1963 their son Sergei was born. Then Shelia, her husband and their son moved to Odessa. Sergei was six years old when my sister died suddenly of breast cancer. Shortly afterward Boris married a woman from Bershad'. His second wife was kind to her stepson. The three of them moved to Israel in 1990. We corresponded until 1993. Now I have no contact with Sergei any more.

My second husband got fond of drinking and life with him became unbearable. When Flora went to school in 1956 I divorced my husband. Misha died of cerebral hemorrhage in 1967. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. After we divorced I went to work as commodity manager at the diner and restaurant trust. Then I became diner director at the Epsilon plant. The diner was awarded the title of a model diner. When there was a cholera epidemic in Odessa in 1970 I quit my job. I got another job offer at the quality assurance department of the plant. Later I worked as logistics supervisor at the plant. My department was responsible for non-ferrous metal supplies. I still took part in the amateur art club, where I sang. We gave concerts in Berdiansk and Leningrad. Flora and I lived in our old apartment and my father received a new apartment in Tiraspolskaya Street nearby.

My son Vladimir lived with my parents. They loved him dearly and created all conditions for his studies. He studied well at school and had many friends of various nationalities. He didn't face any anti-Semitism at school. After finishing the 8th grade in 1962 he went to work at the Poligraphmach plant. He finished an evening secondary school and entered a machine tool manufacture college. After finishing it he was summoned to the army. Vladimir served in an Air Force unit in Nizhneudinsk, Irkutsk region not far from the border with China. I was very concerned about him during the 'Chinese events'. [Editor's note: The interviewee is referring to the Great Proletarian Culture Revolution in China, 1966-1969. The Chinese were alarmed by steady Soviet military build-ups along their common border. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 heightened Chinese apprehensions. In March 1969 Chinese and Soviet troops clashed on Zhenbao Island (known to the Soviets as Damanskiy Island) in the disputed Wusuli Jiang (Ussuri River) border area.] In 1967 Vladimir got a 24-day leave for excellent performance. He came to Odessa where he married Ida, a Jewish girl, whom he knew from the time before he went to the army. Shortly afterward his regiment relocated to Vyshniy Volochek. There he finished a school of sergeants and was sent to the town of Karakalpakiya in Uzbekistan. His wife Ida stayed with her parents in Odessa. She gave birth to a son in 1968. He was named Viacheslav. I got along well with her and my grandson. After the army Vladimir was a production engineer at the plant of radial drilling units. His marriage failed and in 1970 they divorced. Ida and her son moved to the USA in the 1980s.

After they divorced my son moved in with my parents into their one-bedroom apartment in Tairovo district of Odessa that my father received in 1972 as an invalid of the Great Patriotic War. My father worked in a barbershop in the center of Odessa his whole life. He died in 1973. My mother and my son lived in that same apartment by themselves. In 1980 my mother died and my son had to go to court to prove his right of ownership for this apartment. In 1982 Vladimir went on business to a plant in Leningrad where he met his future wife Rita. They got married shortly afterward and Rita moved in with Vladimir. I helped them to do repairs in this one-bedroom apartment and bought them new furniture on installments. In 1983 their son Felix was born. My son was happy with his second wife and had a good job.

In the 1970s many Jews began to move to Israel. The situation was hard; there were meetings where anti-Semitic speeches were made. I believed everything that was said at such meetings. I had a negative attitude toward departure and I still do, as a matter of fact. I'm sure that this country, Ukraine, is my only motherland.

My daughter Flora finished school in 1967. She went to work as a quality controller at the resistance unit plant. Later she came to work at the Epsilon plant. In 1973 Flora married a Russian man. They didn't have any children. Their marriage failed and they got divorced. Flora never

remarried. In 1978 I received a two-bedroom apartment on the ninth floor in a house in Bocharov Street in Kotovskiy district of Odessa. Flora and I moved there. We both worked at the Epsilon plant. We had good salaries and bought new furniture, a TV set and a fridge on installments. When I went on business trips I always bought books: in the 1970s and 1980s there were better supplies of Russian fiction and books by foreign authors to provincial towns. Flora and I loved each other dearly. She was a wonderful daughter. Our friends, relatives, my son, my daughter-in-law Rita and my grandson Felix often came to see us. I got along well with Rita and I loved my grandson. I spent my vacations in recreation centers in the Caucasus. I bought vacations at the plant that were mostly paid by the trade union. I went to resorts such as Pitsunda, Gagry, Sochi, Adler and Kobuleti.

In 1992 I fell severely ill and had to go to hospital. My daughter Flora spent most of her time taking care of me in hospital. Vladimir came to visit me and on such days he stayed in our apartment. One night my son choked to death due to the smoke during a fire in an apartment on our floor. After he died Rita and Felix moved to Leningrad. We used to correspond at the beginning, but then she stopped writing. I heard they moved abroad: to the USA, I believe.

Vladimir's death was a hard blow to me and Flora. I turned 70 in 1994. I retired. My health condition was poor. Flora had diabetes and the level of sugar in her blood increased dramatically. A few years later doctors diagnosed a cyst and she had a surgery in 1995. After the surgery her diabetes got worse and Flora began to lose sight. In January 2002 she was taken to the endocrinological department of a regional hospital with acute diabetes. She had to stay in hospital for two months. Then she was released. She was feeling better. On 16th May, on my birthday, my friends came to congratulate me. Flora felt very well and looked bright and we received our guests together. At 2am she got worse and when the ambulance arrived there was nothing they could do to help her.

Here I am: alone, lonely, weak and in a terrible physical and moral condition at my old age of 79. I feel so bad that I never leave home now. My grandchildren live in the USA, but I have no contact with them. I don't even know in what town they live. Since my daughter's death a social employee of Hesed helps me. I'm so grateful to her that she cleans my apartment and brings me medications and food products. I think it is so good that we have Hesed. I appreciate what they are doing. In 1991 the Jewish life began to revive in Odessa: they restored the synagogue in Remeslennaya Street [Osipov Street at present] where my grandfather Menachem and great-grandfather Shlyoma once used to go. But I can't go there since I'm too weak.

Glossary

## **1 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.



## **2 Odessa pogrom in 1905**

This was the severest pogrom in the history of the city; more than 300 Jews were killed and thousands of families were injured. Among the victims were over 50 members of the Jewish self-defense movement. Flats, shops and small enterprises were looted by the pogromists. The police stood by and did not defend the Jewish population.

## **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **4 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry.

## **5 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.

## **6 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

## **7 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.

## **8 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were

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

## **9 Gangs**

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

## **10 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

## **11 Cheder for girls**

Model cheders were set up in Russia where girls studied reading and writing.

## **12 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **13 Young Octobrist**

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

## **14 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.

### **15 Torgsin stores**

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

### **16 Kuyalnik**

Balnear resort named after the firth called Kuyalnik on the northern-western coast of the Black Sea near Odessa.

### **17 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)**

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

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

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

### **19 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.

### **20 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.

## **21 Kursk battle**

The greatest tank battle in the history of World War II, which began on 5th July 1943 and ended eight days later. The biggest tank fight, involving almost 1,200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides, took place in Prokhorovka on 12th July and ended with the defeat of the German tank unit.