

Vladimir Tarskiy

Vladimir Tarskiy is a short man. He is sharp, chatty and cheerful. He lives in a two-bedroom apartment in Konkovo, a suburb of Moscow. His wife Anna died in 2003. Vladimir is a hospitable and friendly host. His apartment is furnished with furniture from the early 1960s. He has many books on technical subjects and fiction. He was willing to give us an interview and he fondly told us the story of his family.

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My family background

Unfortunately, I know very little about the relatives of my father Leonid Tarskiy, or Emmanuel Sokolovskiy, which was his real name. My father was actively involved in the revolutionary communist movement. Leonid Tarskiy was his pseudonym. His documents indicating this name were issued to him at the time, when the Communist Party was in the underground and was persecuted by the tsarist authorities. In the early 1920s this became his name for the rest of his life, and he was called that at home and at work, and it was given in his documents.

My parents weren't officially married, and my father lived separately from us. He left Moscow for the Far East and later moved to Voronezh [about 450 km south of Moscow]. My father came from the family of the Sokolovskiys. All I know about his father is that his name was Lev Sokolovskiy and that he lived in the town of Nikolaev [about 400 km south of Kiev]. His children were also born there. When they grew up, they got involved in revolutionary activities and left their home. I don't know anything about my paternal grandmother whatsoever.

My father had an older brother and two sisters. His brother Ilia Sokolovskiy was born in Nikolaev in the 1880s. He became a journalist and wrote popular articles for Odessa newspapers under the pseudonym of Sedoy. My father's older sister Alexandra was born in the 1870s. She was actively involved in underground revolutionary activities. She became Trotsky's [1](#) wife in the 1890s. According to my mother, my father didn't speak well of Trotsky. Probably the reason was that he left his sister with two children. Also, the shadow of Trotsky probably fell on him as well as his brother Ilia and his sister Alexandra who all perished in the Gulag [2](#) during the period of Stalin's arrests [the so-called Great Terror] [3](#). They were blamed of relations with Trotsky, who was in disgrace, and sent to the Gulag.

Recently my relatives in Israel came across a magazine in which they published the memories of a former prisoner of the Gulag in Russian. She witnessed how Sedoy perished. He was exhausted and weak, and his convoy stabbed him with their bayonets. During the Great Patriotic War [4](#) Stalin issued an order for all prisoners to be taken away from German occupation to the East. They were exhausted and fell dying, and their convoy finished them with bayonets. Regretfully, I don't know anything about my father's sister Maria.

My father also got involved in revolutionary activities when he was young. As I mentioned before, Tarskiy was his pseudonym and later it became his surname, as well as mine. My father's older brother Ilia provided money for my father to finish a Humanitarian Faculty in Switzerland. At the age of 22 he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine at the 1st and 2nd Congresses of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of Ukraine and the Central Committee sent him to Odessa [5](#) [about 450 km south of Kiev] to organize the Bolshevik underground to struggle against Denikin [6](#). My father became a Bolshevik journalist. He supervised the 'Odesskiy communist' newspaper publications. Later my father was chief editor of the 'Knigonosha', a popular magazine in Odessa in the 1920s.

I know more about my mother's relatives. Her paternal grandfather Reb Boruch der Magid Roshal lived in the town of Shklov. [Editor's note: Names like Reb Boruch der Magid Roshal were typical Jewish names in the 19th century. There was a common belief that if the angel of death would come for Boruch, he would not find him, but Magid and vice versa. The name was believed to guard a person from troubles.] I don't know when my great-grandfather was born, but he died in 1890. I read about him in the biography of my uncle Victor, an amazing and extraordinary person. He wrote his autobiography in 1904. I read that in his childhood he was under the influence of his grandfather, 'a preacher by profession, a man with patriarchal appearance, deeply religious and with an inexhaustible sense of humor'.

I don't know anything about his wife, my great-grandmother, unfortunately. The parents of my grandmother were Gersh and Nehama, nee Vermel, Tseitlin. They must have come from Shklov as well. This is all I know about them. According to the family legend, my mother's father changed his surname to Rabinovich to avoid mobilization to the army. This was the surname of some childless relatives who adopted him fictitiously [at that time the only sons in families were not subject to military service]. My grandfather's first name was Honon Yankel. He was a quiet man. He read a lot and helped his wife who owned a store. He often went on business trips. When he was at home, he worked in the store, always hiding his books under the counter from his enraged wife. He was born in Shklov in 1850 and died in Odessa in 1907. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. His wife, Maria Rabinovich, nee Tseitlina, owned a store in Odessa. She was a very busy woman and had to take care of her family. My grandmother was born in 1857 and died in Moscow in 1932. She was cremated and buried in Donskoy cemetery. Later all the deceased of the Rabinovich clan were buried there.

My mother's parents had twelve children. The older children were born in Shklov. After my grandfather died in 1907, the family moved to Odessa. All children finished grammar school and were educated and intelligent people. My mother Yeva Lyulkina, nee Rabinovich, was the last child in the family. Her Jewish name was Hava. She was born in 1899. My grandmother owned a big store of household goods, but her children made a different choice in their life. All the older children got involved in revolutionary activities, traveled a lot and were taken to prisons. All of their

friends and comrades found shelter in the house. The younger children, Rosa [Jewish name Rachil], Sophia [Jewish name Sarrah] and my mother Yeva were supposed to take care of their older sister and brothers and their comrades, when they were behind bars. The younger children were called Sonechka, Rosochka and Yevochka in the family. They sent or delivered parcels to their brothers and sisters and their comrades in jails.

My grandmother often went on business trips. While she was away, the younger children packed goods from her store and took some cash keeping it a secret from her. My mother's brother Victor was born in 1882. He finished a Realschule [7](#) in Odessa and began to work as a propagandist of the committee of social democrats. He was arrested and put in Odessa prison. He took part in a hunger strike, was taken to jail in Voronezh and exiled to eastern Siberia. He participated in a riot in a transit prison and was sentenced to 20 years of forced labor in a camp. In January 1905 Victor escaped through a mine to Paris where he became a professional revolutionary. His life was like an adventure story. Several times he traveled to Russia illegally, was arrested but escaped again. He lived in London, Argentina, Australia and Africa. After [the Russian Revolution of] 1917 [8](#) he returned to Russia through Japan. On his way back to Russia he managed to force Chinese officials to sign a protocol of reassignment of the Chinese Eastern Railroad to Russia. [Editor's note: the railroad in North Eastern China, from Manchuria station through Kharbin to the Far East and Port Arthur, built by Russia in 1897-1903. Under the Russian-Chinese Treaty of 1924 it was recognized as a commercial enterprise to be managed jointly by China and Russia].

Although he didn't have a higher education, Victor spoke several European languages. During the Soviet rule he was assistant Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences for the publication of the Big Soviet Encyclopedia. Later he worked as a diplomat in Latin America and China. Mayakovsky [9](#) was his friend. He accompanied the poet on his trip to Mexico. I remember him to be a merry and kind person telling lots of jokes. He was just called Vitka in the family. He died in 1934.

My mother's brother Philip, called Fishka in the family, was not so accessible. He was born in 1885. He was a trade representative in the Soviet Embassy in London, traveled to Moscow and stayed in a suite in the Metropol Hotel. Later he was deputy minister of foreign trade and deputy minister of forestry. He vanished in the Gulag camps in 1937.

My mother's sister Cipora, born around 1880, was a professional revolutionary. The tsarist police exiled her to the town of Ust-Sysolsk [about 1,200 km north of Moscow], where she died in 1913.

In 1920 or 1921 the family moved to Moscow. Grandmother Maria Rabinovich lived with her daughter Rosa till she died in 1932. I often stayed with them, when my parents took me there. I remember my grandmother well. She had a sound mind and a sense of humor till her last days. She never made the impression of an old and decrepit person. Being a real Odessite she used to repeat with the typical sense of humor that these people have: 'As much as I know, it doesn't hurt me'. The family was very close and its members always supported each other. The older brothers, Victor and Philip, gave Sophia and Rosa money to buy a cooperative apartment in 1933. Our relatives and friends used to have gatherings in this apartment in Odessa. The doors were always kept open for visitors. Later, when our family got into trouble, we found shelter in this apartment. My cousin Marianna, Aunt Sophia's daughter, and my sister Inga, her daughter Anna and grandson Zhenia live in this apartment now.

My stepfather, Veniamin Lyulkin, was also an open, cheerful and hospitable person. I rarely communicated with him, though. Veniamin was quick and kind. He was a high-level official in the field of agriculture and grain stocks. My mother had two children from her first marriage: my sister Victoria, born in 1922, and I, born in 1925. Veniamin Lyulkin was the father of our younger sister Inga, born in 1931.

I don't know where or how my parents met, but I guess that they came together through their revolutionary activities. Of course, Jewish traditions were out of the question. They were atheists. I was born in 1925. My early childhood was happy and untroubled. My mother, father, my sister and I lived in a big house in the center of Moscow. This building used to house a hotel in the early 20th century. In 1925 our family moved into two rooms of an eight-bedroom communal apartment [10](#) where the owner of the hotel had lived before the Revolution.

Growing up

My sister and I stayed with our nanny Polia, a young pretty girl from Riazan region. She adored me, as my older members of the family told me later. I was a quiet, agreeable and nice child. I didn't cause anyone any trouble and was everybody's darling. My nanny took me for walks. I particularly liked the bus stop near our house, where bright red English 'Lowland' buses with shining copper rails stopped. They looked like sailors starting on their journey. I envied the happy passengers going on their long tours. I was passionately fond of traveling when I grew up.

After my father moved to Voronezh he corresponded with my sister and me sending us cards with short letters written on the back, giving us instructions regarding studies and the list of books he was sending to Moscow. In summer 1932 I started kindergarten. This kindergarten took the children on trips to the seashore. I remember a Black Sea Fleet squadron with a battleship and cruisers in the sea, a boat cruise and a meeting with Red army troopers for who we gave a concert. When in 1929 our stepfather joined the family, we moved to his big three-bedroom apartment on Gorky Street in the center of Moscow. My kind and strong stepfather was quite an agreeable replacement of my father for me. I went to the Russian school near our house. My school life till the 6th grade could be described with my mother's saying: 'Quiet successes and noisy conduct'. I was a naughty and lazy idler. I was a pioneer [see All-union pioneer organization] [11](#) like everybody else and blindly believed in communist ideas.

In the late 1930s our family faced a number of disasters. My father became the first victim. He was deputy chief of the political department of the South-Eastern Railroad and executive editor of the 'Vperyod' ['Go forward'] communist newspaper. On 13th May 1937 he was sentenced to ten years in prison for 'anti-Soviet propaganda and illegal possession of weapons'. According to the information of the chief information center of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the RF, my father 'died in prison on 10th January 1938; location unknown'.

The next victim was my stepfather, sentenced to ten years in prison on 16th July 1937 for 'sabotage and participation in the anti-Soviet Trotskyist organization'. In September my mother was notified on the 'compaction of her living conditions due to her husband's arrest'. My mother submitted a claim to the court referring to her having three children. On 3rd November official representatives made their appearance in our apartment with a search and arrest warrant. A Special Council of the NKVD [12](#) USSR sentenced my mother to 'eight years in penitentiary camps as a member of the family of an enemy of the people' [13](#). My mother was taken away that same

night.

My sisters Victoria and Inga, the younger one was five years old, and I, eleven years old, were taken to a transit home for orphaned children - that we became all of a sudden despite our parents living - at the Holy Danilov Monastery in the center of Moscow. We got a wash in the shower, they took our fingerprints and photographs en face and profile, as if we were adult criminals. We were provided sufficient food and had clean bed sheets, but we weren't allowed to leave the monastery. The walls around the Monastery were stuffed with broken glass. We were horrified waiting for them to send us to a children's home, because we knew that my sisters and I would end up in different children's homes in different towns and would be given different names and never be able to find each other again. Twice a day our tutors arranged 'lessons of political education' for the children of enemies of the people, taking us through a crowd of whistling and hooting local stray children: 'Look at the saboteurs and traitors of their Motherland! Death to spies'. Our aunt Sophia saved us. She managed to obtain guardianship of the three of us. She took us to her home and told us that our father had been sentenced to ten years in prison without the right to correspond with us. From the talks in the children's home I already knew that it meant the death penalty. She also told us that our mother had been sentenced to eight years in camps on the charges of being a non-informer.

Aunt Sophia had her own daughter, Marianna, born in 1932. The family never mentioned the father of the girl. Sophia worked as an economist in an office, but she couldn't manage to support four children and aunt Rosa helped her. We went to school. Many of my classmates' parents had been arrested as well. It was not appreciated to talk about it, and we felt very lonely. When the war in Spain [see Spanish Civil War] [14](#) began, the schoolchildren began to dream to fight on the side of the republicans. I was no different. 'It's important to go abroad', I thought naively remembering exciting stories that uncle Victor had told us. The radio broadcast merry songs: 'We live merrily today and tomorrow will be even better...' And our situation was that our aunts worked so very hard to feed four children.

So, there was a firm decision taken to go to Spain. I was responsible for buying bread for the family. I saved some change each time till I had enough to buy a train ticket to Rzhev. I plotted the route: the nearest was the Latvian border, from there I would get to the sea, take a boat to France and then cross the border to Spain. I drew the route on the map of Europe; this map is still kept in my files in the Ministry of Home Affairs archives. For the case I would be captured by the opposite side in Spain I had typed a pile of anti-Soviet flyers on our typewriter at home. So I took a train to Rzhev from where several international trains were going to Riga.

I got to Rzhev [about 200 km west of Moscow] and managed to get into an international railcar. It was empty and all doors to the compartments, but one, were locked. My heart was pounding. I got into this compartment: there were rolled mattresses on the third bench and I hid behind them. I woke up from the noise of slamming doors: a frontier man and the conductor were inspecting the railcar. They didn't notice me and the border was crossed easily. So all I had to do was stay quiet till the train reached Riga [about 680 km west of Moscow]; it was like a sentence to ten years in prison to wait that long. At the first stop I got out of the railcar and into an empty barrel without a bottom to spend the night. A janitor discovered me and took me to the local police who put me back on the train to transfer me to the transportation and road department of the Rzhev NKVD office.

They searched me and discovered a compass, a map and the flyers with the false slogans of the Soviet power, about the absence of freedom and lines for bread. 'Who gave you these, boy and where were you going to take this anti-Soviet stuff?' 'I wrote them myself'. I spent the first month in a cell of 4x1.5 meters and about 2.5 meters high. There was a bed attached to the wall, a stool and a bulb over a small window with a wooden shield outside. Later I learned that this shield was called a 'muzzle' in prisoners' jargon. It was tightly adjusted to the wall from the outside leaving only a palm-wide slit on top through which the prisoners saw a piece of sky. There was not even a table or a toilet in the cell. The latter became the cause of my first conflict. According to the procedures for bull pens there was a schedule for going to the toilet to be followed by the convoy, while I believed that I could go to the toilet whenever I wished. I knocked on the door, but they didn't let me out. I complained to a supervisor who explained the procedure to me. I got along well with my guards. They were young guys who were probably serving their mandatory army term. They didn't bother me with interrogations and came to my cell twice a week.

All I saw was my cell, the toilet, corridors and the interrogation room. There was also a small yard where I could walk and three to four other prisoners were walking as well. There was a wall surrounding the yard on two sides, and on the two other sides there was a high fence with several rows of barbed wire on top of it. There was a tower and a guard with a rifle on it in the corner of the yard. There was a radio on a post outside, and at night I could listen to the news. Once it announced that the republicans had been defeated, and this made me upset more than my personal problems.

Two investigation officers were conducting my case. I refused to tell them my name or home address, but my aunt Sophia's request helped the investigation to discover my address. My restless aunt addressed the Holy Danilov Monastery where I had been in 1937 after my mother's arrest. The omnipresent organs helped her to find me in Rzhev where she arrived immediately. The investigation was over. I was sentenced under Article 58 items 1a - treason, 10 - anti-Soviet agitation and 84 - crossing the state border.

I was then taken to a common cell. It was a dim cell with a ray of light coming from the narrow slit between the wall and the 'muzzle'. The window was in the upper part of the wall, and prisoners could only see the sky standing on the table pressing their faces tightly to the window niche. This was forbidden by prison rules and was punished by sending one to a punishment cell. I met my co-prisoners, got attached to them and close to some others. I told them about the events in the world and in the country.

The prison in Rzhev was built in the tsarist time. There were large numbers of inscriptions on all kinds of subjects on its brown and red walls. There were two rows of plank beds by the walls on two sides of the cell. There was a toilet in one corner, and the table was in the brightest part of the cell by the window. There was an electric bulb attached to the ceiling above the window opening, in a glass cowl and protected with thick wire grid. There were twelve prisoners in the cell sentenced for anti-Soviet propaganda. One was the former assistant people's commissar of the food industry. He was an intelligent older man. He taught us English and Arabic.

There were ridiculous circumstances under which people were taken to prison. One young aviation technician after the 1st May parade of 1938, for which he prepared air planes for the flight over the Red Square on Stalin's order - and there were 1000 planes involved - told his comrades that he

had been invited to a banquet in the Kremlin where he had a shot with Voroshylov [14](#). As a proof, he showed them a card with a portrait of the people's commissar signed: 'My companion for a drink and snack. Klim Voroshylov.' He actually bought this card and signed it himself. He was reported on immediately, arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for 'political hooliganism'.

There was also an older blacksmith who had been a cavalry man during World War I. Somebody also reported on him. The investigation officers beat him demanding to confess of having served in intelligence. The blacksmith, who was used to fights in his village, endured it and kept silent. He actually didn't seem to understand what they wanted from him. We spent time playing chess which was also forbidden. We made chess from bread painting the white ones with toothpowder. To make the board, we wiped tobacco ash onto the table and then made black cells on it. I was once sent to a punishment cell for playing chess, when the chief of jail broke into our cell catching me playing chess and ordered the guards to take me to the punishment cell for gross violation of the rules of conduct.

I was taken to a small 2x1.5 meter stone hole with a ventilation opening under the ceiling. There were many curses inscribed on the walls. There were sewage remains on the concrete floor. The guard said, 'Don't knock - nobody will hear'. My body gradually got sweaty. I felt giddy and dizzy. There was no toilet or stool in the cell. My fellow prisoners demanded at this time that the 'teenager' was taken back to his cell. Perhaps, this helped or for other reasons four hours later I was taken back. We also used to hum songs. Prisoners knew many songs. Songs cheered us up, quieting us and helping to get adjusted to one another mitigating the dislike that appeared among prisoners from time to time. My investigation officers didn't bother me and I even forgot that they were still there.

One day in early June the guard opened the door and said: 'Tarskiy, get your belongings and come out'. I was taken to a special black car with steel bars commonly called 'voronok' [derived from 'Varon', raven in Russian, and means bringing trouble]. I was taken to a room where there was an officer whom I had never seen before. He offered me a seat and read the sentence of the special council of the NKVD USSR [extra-judicial punitive body within the NKVD authorized to issue sentences without a trial or attorney. In 1939 it was acknowledged to be illegal and its sentences became ineffective]: 'The defendant charged under Article 58-10 part 1 and 84 of the CC of the RSFSR Tarskiy V.L. should be set free with the inclusion of the term of punishment into the term of his stay in the bull pen'. They asked me to sign under my obligation not to disclose the circumstances and materials of my case, gave me a ticket to Moscow and took me to the railway station in a car.

I returned home, and half a year later my stepfather, Veniamin Lyulkin, was released from prison. It turned out that Stalin needed to have strategic food stocks made while my stepfather and a number of best experts in bread stocks were in prison. He issued an order to discharge them. My stepfather began to pull strings in Moscow for my mother's release: 'She is in prison due to me, and I have been found innocent. Let her free'. However, my mother was only discharged on 21st December 1940. We didn't get our apartment in Moscow back. There was our big family of eight living in my aunt Sophia and Rosa's apartment.

There was always the atmosphere of love in this apartment. The sisters Rosa, Sophia and Yevea loved and supported each other, and my mother was grateful to her sisters that they rescued her

children. My mother lost apartment and belongings, but at least the children were doing all right. My stepfather became the head of this big family. He loved all of us. When he saw me thin with my head shaved, he demanded my certificate of release and burned it. 'That's it! Nobody knows about the jail. Don't tell anybody and live your life as a free person'.

In the 1960s I, a veteran of the war and former intelligence sergeant, addressed the KGB [15](#) with a request for review of my case. The officers there were surprised: 'What do you mean, citizen! You crossed the Soviet border, didn't you? You did. This means, you are still a state criminal and you are not subject to rehabilitation [16](#)'. Many years later, on 18th October 1991, the law of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic], 'Rehabilitation of the victims of political repression', was issued canceling all verdicts of the 'Special Council of the NKVD', and the 'council' itself was recognized as illegal. On 23rd June 1993 I finally received a certificate of rehabilitation.

After I was released I went to the 6th grade of another school. I had smartened up in jail and became the best pupil of this school. I had excellent marks only in the 6th and 7th grades. Then I decided to enter a technical communications school. They admitted me without exams and nobody knew about my past and my parents' sentences.

On Sunday 22nd June 1941 only my mother and I were at home, when the radio broadcast with a tragic voice of the announcer: 'Listen to an important news'. Then Molotov [17](#) spoke. As it happened, the war had begun and bombs were falling. I was 16 and had a passport when the war began. Fire protection groups were formed. In the first month of the war we patrolled the roofs in Moscow installing barrels with water, bags of sand and big long tongs to fight the fire bombs. There was an air raid on 22nd July 1941. The Germans made a tactical mistake. There were markets under glass roofs near railway stations in Moscow and the railway stations were camouflaged. So they dropped bombs on those glass roofs, but the stations were intact.

We saw German planes targeted by our ground artillery and were happy when their planes were hit. Later there were bombings every day. Fire bombs broke through the roofs and stuck in the attics. We grabbed them with tongs and threw them into barrels with water. We saw big fires. Soon a direction for the evacuation of the children from Moscow was issued. My sisters Victoria and Inga, my cousin Marianna, my mother and I and my aunts Sophia and Rachil evacuated to the town of Naberezhniye Chelny [about 900 km east of Moscow]. There was a big grain elevator in the town, and my stepfather had acquaintances who worked there. He made arrangements for the children to stay in the kindergarten and the adults to be accommodated in local houses.

I hated to evacuate, but my family convinced me to do so since I was the only man with a whole bunch of children and women. We sailed there by boat and I stayed with machine operators all the time. When we arrived at Naberezhniye Chelny, I went to look for a job and was sent to an equipment yard in a big kolkhoz [18](#) where I worked as a scale operator and later, when tractor operators went to the army, their foreman trained me to operate tractors and I became a tractor operator. I was very strong. My mother and my aunts went to work, and Inga, Victoria and Marianna were in boarding school. We didn't starve.

After the harvest I went to work as an electrician at the grain elevator and later went to a course of agricultural mechanics. I was sent to work in a kolkhoz. I fixed a vehicle and wanted to drive it, but I didn't get permission and the work I had to do seemed dull to me. On the way to Naberezhniye Chelny I got interested in the work of boat motor operators. I quit the kolkhoz and went to work on

the 'Zhemchuzhina' ['Pearl'] boat, the biggest freight and passenger boat in the Volga-Kama basin.

I worked in 3x1 shifts: working one shift and resting the two following shifts. I was a stoker working from 12 midnight till 4am. At four I was replaced and fell asleep on the dark iron floor right where I was. It felt as if I had just lied down when they were pushing me to get back to work. We sailed up and down the Kama and Volga. As the front line was approaching Stalingrad [about 900 km from Moscow] in 1942 the 'Zhemchuzhina' was used for the needs of the front for the transportation of ammunition and the wounded. The Volga was not as wide as it is now and the Germans blocked it by dropping mines. There were barges and towboats exploding on them. Later I got to know that there was Stalin's order to leave 10 percent of the crew on a damaged ship and the remaining staff was to join the marines.

During the war

Once our boat bumped into a mine and I was assigned to the marines. I was 17. We were trained to manage rifles. I was wounded in my first battle and taken to hospital. From there I was sent to the Ordzhonikidze motorcyclist school in the town of Minusinsk [about 3,400 km east of Moscow], but they didn't admit me after they got to know about my family and sent me back to the frontline. However, the military registry office authorized me to find out, if there were students in this school who wished to go to the front before they finished the course of training. I stayed there for some time looking for the strongest young men. I had meals in the cafeteria of this school. The food was miserable: a big bowl of boiled water with potato peels, bread crumbs and food fat made from kerosene and oil, and mashed potatoes for the 2nd course. The volunteers received their rationed food and we went to the front line.

Our destination point was near Smolensk [about 350 km west of Moscow] and from there I was sent to the Omsk infantry school where I failed for the same reason of my family history. Finally I joined Novosibirsk reserve infantry division 21 training infantry sergeants. I liked it there. I wrote for a newspaper about our commanding officers. I was promoted to the rank of a private first class. I was praised for my performance in this school. They even sent my mother a letter of gratitude for raising a good son. We were accommodated in big earth huts for 200 tenants. There was a forest nearby. We exercised drills and mine firing. I then joined the Komsomol [19](#), and became a Komsomol battalion organizer. I wrote articles for a district newspaper.

Then we headed to the front as a marching battalion. We stayed longer in Novosibirsk [about 2,800 km east of Moscow]. We were thirsty. I took a bucket to fetch some water, but when I ran back - there was no train. I saw the train some 50 meters away and ran after it. I caught up with the last railcar and jumped into the tambour. It was autumn, cold wind and snow falling. I was freezing. I put down the bucket trying to get myself warmer. When the train stopped, I ran to an open platform, and on the next stop I ran to our railcar. I jumped on the footboard, but I couldn't lift my arm to knock and knocked with my head instead. The others dragged me inside and gave me half a glass of pure spirit and I felt my ears getting warmer.

For the first time we realized that we were moving to the front at Bologoye station [about 200 km west of Moscow]. There was hell at this station. It must have been bombed severely: there were twisted rails and turned over locomotives. We moved on. At night we got off the train in Toropetz [about 400 km west of Moscow], and marched to infantry division 71 of the Baltic Front. I was assigned to the division intelligence. Later I served in intelligence units of different divisions and

fronts throughout the war. I had to catch prisoners for interrogation, identify a junction between the wings of armies, identify the front line and set up communications with partisans.

We were in the northeastern part of Belarus, in the vicinity of Nevel [about 450 km south of St. Petersburg]. There were partisans in the middle of swamps to which Germans couldn't get access. We delivered directions, and weapons and ammunition to partisans. We sometimes got directions to capture a prisoner for interrogation, but at times it just happened so that we did. Once we were ordered to identify and bring together the flanks of a division, when we captured a prisoner. This German trooper either got lost or had no idea where he was going. When he saw about eight of us he raised his hands shouting 'Hitler kaput'. This was a common statement when they surrendered.

We went on tasks in our military uniforms, but left all documents and awards. To capture a prisoner for interrogation we went in two groups: one capture group and one cover group. I was big and strong. Once a German trooper stabbed me in my neck with his knife. I stabbed him to death and we didn't capture a prisoner that time. It took us one, two or even three days to capture a prisoner since we also had to identify access to capture one at night. We had to find one or two German troopers because if there were more of them they would start firing at us and this would mean the end. Germans were very cautious guarding their positions at night. When we bumped into one German he was afraid of starting fire and so were we. He feared that if he started making a noise we would kill him, and we were afraid of attracting attention. When German troopers realized there was a group of us they usually surrendered. I have another scar on my hip: by another German who tried to stab me in my stomach.

Our division advanced to Nevel. The Soviet troops started their advance to break through the blockade of Leningrad [20](#), and our division was ordered to attack from the north of Nevel to distract Germans and make it impossible for them to provide additional troops to the Leningrad Front. We suffered significant losses, but we had to demonstrate a massive attack and all division staff including accountants and intelligence troopers were distributed to infantry regiments. I was assistant platoon commander. After an artillery preparation we advanced across the Lithuanian border to the town of Pustoska [about 400 south of Leningrad]. I was with a 'Dehtaryov infantry' machine gun. My friend Semyon Narovlianskiy perished in this battle, and I was wounded: both my hands were shot through during an attack.

I left the battle field and was taken to a hospital in Nevel. The doctor decided to amputate my hand. She was a dentist by profession. An old assistant doctor saved my hand. He was telling the doctor to save the 17-year old guy's hand and wrote to my mother, who rushed to where I was. She wanted them to send me to Moscow. My sister Victoria talked to her co-student who was the daughter of a general, chief of medical service of a hospital in Moscow. My mother obtained a letter of permission to take me to Moscow. A doctor in this hospital performed surgery on my hand. At that time my mother received a letter from my military unit. They informed her that I was awarded a medal, the number of the medal and that the medal and a certificate were sent to the department of awards. My mother was very happy. This was my first award.

After the hospital I was sent back to the front line. I was assigned an intelligence trooper to the operations unit of a Guard Mine Firing Unit. The intelligence troopers were to identify the coordinates of German troops. There were Katyusha units at quite a distance from where we were at the front line. We also served as communication troopers. There were no radios, but wiring units

and when the wire got damaged we were to find the breakage. Once I was wounded in my right shoulder trying to fix a communication line. In total I served two weeks in the Guard Mine Firing Unit. I had to stay about a month and a half in a hospital near the front line. I was wounded in January and in late March or early April I was back to the front, in the 17th Guard division.

This was the period of preparation to the 'Bagration' operation for the liberation of Belarus. This was the 3rd Belarusian Front. There were big battles near Vitebsk [about 450 km west of Moscow]. At times divisions dispersed several kilometers away from one another, and there were swamps between them, and then intelligence troopers were to find the flanks to take them together. Following this order we got into treble firing of two our divisions and one German. I was severely wounded there. After the hospital I was sent back to the front. This was already the year of 1944. I had to catch up with our troops. I got to Orsha [about 550 km from Moscow], and the front line was in the vicinity of Minsk [about 720 km from Moscow], and there were no trains moving in this direction. There were trains full of the military from hospitals going back to the front in Orsha.

All of a sudden a passenger train stopped at the station. It was heading to Minsk. There were officers and generals in the train and we climbed the roofs of the railcars. The commander of the station couldn't allow people to be on the roof. He came to the platform with his men armed with machine guns ordering us to clear the roof. Nobody listened to him. Everybody was eager to go to the front, when all of a sudden a general got off the train and shot his gun into the air demanding for the commander to make his appearance: 'How much longer can we be here? I'm going to command a division. If the train doesn't move in five minutes I shall shoot you and inform the commandment that I've done it on grounds of sabotage'. The commandant waved his hand and the train moved on. We arrived in Minsk sitting on the roof of the train.

The railway station had recently been cleared of Germans, and there were ashes and ruins around. In the commandant office we were told to move on since the Third Belarusian Front was in Lithuania. In my effort to catch up with my troops I walked across Lithuania as far as Eastern Prussia. The military heading to the front line from hospitals had certificates for rationed food or hot meals that they could receive in special provision centers on their way. In Eastern Prussia, where I arrived, was detached fighting anti-tank artillery brigade 47 of the reserve of the chief commandment. Its commanding officer was captain Chemeris, a nice, but weird, person. He tested me, but since I had studied artillery, I knew all kinds of details, including targeting and identification of coordinates. He liked me so much that he appointed me commanding officer of a platoon.

We served side by side with him till the victory over Germany and later in Japan. Our task was to identify the targets and coordinates. Since this was anti-tank artillery with direct targeting our observation point was located beside the front line positions of infantry where we performed our tasks. At first there were inert battles in Eastern Prussia. Our brigade participated in a few breakthroughs. We were making the way for infantry marching ahead. We took the firing positions on tank risk direction locations. When intelligence units advised us that there were tanks accumulated in the rear of German troops we moved in that direction, deployed there waiting. If there was an order to go into action, we did.

Once, when we were deployed near the Lithuanian-German border, Captain Chemeris called for me. He always had unusual ideas. This time he ordered me to go to the rear of the Germans and

hide in a haystack unnoticed by the Germans. When the Germans started on their tank attack, we were to set all haystacks on fire and return to our unit. In this way the tanks were to be seen in the light of burning haystacks and we could shoot at them easily. My soldier and I looked at each other. We had no idea how we could manage this. Where would we go in the background of burning haystacks? However, this was an order and we went on. We discovered a spot in the lowland where there were no Germans and where we could crawl into their rear. We crawled to haystacks and stayed there overnight, but there was no attack that night. We stayed in those haystacks for another day till we could manage to go back to our positions in the dark. The commanding officer praised us.

Then fierce efforts to liquidate the Eastern-Prussian grouping were taken. Our brigade joined a tank army. We broke through the front line with the tanks. A tank is a noticeable target and we were to neutralize the weapon emplacement to enable the tanks to attack. For these actions and the storming attacks on two towns our army received appreciation of Stalin twice. There were fierce battles in this direction. We witnessed how General Cherniakhovskiy, Commander of the 3rd Belarusian Front, was lethally wounded in a small town cleared from the Germans who retreated into a small forest on a hill in the north. Thus the town was in their full view. Our attack was delayed. Cherniakhovskiy was a very energetic man, the youngest Commander of the Front. A column of vehicles with the Commander of the Front drove to the headquarters. The staff rushed outside, the Germans saw it and shot Cherniakhovskiy.

Marshal Vasilevskiy replaced him. He was chief of general staff before. We, soldiers, sensed the difference. Perhaps, German troops were exhausted from previous battles or Vasilevskiy was more skilled than the previous commander, but German troops began to fall apart. They were encircled and eliminated without significant losses or hysterical battles. The front promptly advanced to the Baltic Sea. The Eastern-Prussian grouping of Germans was cut into two parts.

I need to mention an episode that hasn't been recorded in military history. Königsberg [today Kaliningrad, Russia] was encircled twice. The first time, and we participated in it, was a breakthrough to Zalmanskiy peninsula. We advanced to the sea west of Königsberg cutting it from Pilau where the Germans had several tank units. They attacked, captured many prisoners and came back to Königsberg. I need to mention here that while our aviation bombed military facilities and utilities, the Americans and British raged on cluster bombings of the towns that were to belong to us after the war. They destroyed Dresden this way and bombed Königsberg. We were in a town near Königsberg before Germans repositioned themselves in Königsberg. The allies didn't drop bombs on this town and all German elite took shelter in it.

When we came into this town, there were civilians in it. We had never met any before. Peaceful citizens usually left the towns before we entered there, but here we broke into a living German organism. I didn't care about women then. Besides, nobody raped my wife or killed my children, but there were older soldiers who had information that their wives had been raped by the Germans or their wives and children had been killed. They began to take revenge on German women. I don't think there were more than 20 percent of the German women left who weren't raped in this town. The soldiers destroyed and ruined everything. I saw them throwing down a grand piano listening to its clinking. It didn't occur to them that it would be all ours in the end. They burned everything. They sensed the victory. If they had saved every house on our territory because it was ours, there, on the German land, they wreaked vengeance on Germans. 'Let's set this house on fire and I will

get warm nearby.'

I remember our troops seizing a railway station where there were trains with valuables that Germans had taken to this station. There were a few railcars with Swiss watches. Our soldiers took five to ten watches each. I didn't need a watch, so I took a box full of Zeiss binoculars and stereo tubes with periscope features. These were valuable trophies for my intelligence activities. While we were in this town, we didn't know what was happening in the rear, and at this time Germans troops broke back to Königsberg. We were ordered to move in the assigned direction, when we bumped into a commandant's platoon. 'Who are you?'. We began to explain that we were from the frontline observation point and that we had got the order to return to our unit. They took us to the commandant office to clarify the circumstances and put us into a cellar with cupboards full of delicious food. There was silver tableware on the table in the middle of the cellar. This had probably been a hotel or a café before.

We took to drinking and eating, when we heard some noise and cracking sounds upstairs. The door opened and our commanding officer and the commandant came in. He pretended to speak in a threatening voice 'What are you doing here? Eating? The battery is fighting and you are fooling around here? Rush to the battery location!' We were sorry to leave the spot, but moved to the position of the battery. By the way, we left there on time since the Germans went on their attack: their two groupings that we had split before united and they occupied Königsberg and the town where we had stayed before.

There were many battles and attacks before we broke through to the sea and proceeded to Königsberg and fought it back in April. For the attack on Königsberg I was awarded the Order of the Red Star [22](#). Then there was the Zalmanskiy peninsula and fortress Pilau. This was a historical fortress. There were huge marine cannons there. During our attack on Königsberg we had an inconvenient position to support our infantry. We couldn't see the positions of the enemy. Our commander ordered me to move onto the territory of the enemy and shoot air rockets in the direction of the positions that were to be destroyed. There was an artillery preparation and Germans were hiding away. I went on this task with my radio operator.

After fulfilling the task we hardly managed to escape from there. Later this radio operator perished. I usually went on my intelligence tasks with a radio operator. Three of my radio operators perished during the war. One was hit by a mine and smashed to pieces, there were no remains left to bury; another operator perished in the tank brigade near Pilau. This battle was called 'Landing troops on armor'. I was sitting on the tank beside my radio operator to send messages about our whereabouts, when a shell exploded near us. He was killed and I just fell off and wasn't even wounded. He was a skilled carpenter. When a soldier had been killed before, this man made him a coffin and a grave pillar with a star. He said back then, 'Here we bury him while there will be nobody to make a decent burial for me', and indeed it happened so. I put him aside, we threw stones over him, marked the spot on the map and moved on to Königsberg.

I didn't have any fear during the attack. I was young and had no children. Besides, I had been in the war for some time. I used to feel fear in Belarus and in Smolensk region during bombings and air raids, when we were defenseless. There were bombs falling on you and the soil hitting you from all around. It wasn't just fear, it was the feeling of hopelessness, when you look for a hiding, but there is none. An attack is different. When I had been wounded in my hands I felt like running

forward and tearing everything apart with my teeth, though I couldn't even hold weapons. Any of us felt the same. We attacked shouting 'Hurrah! There! Go forward!', or advanced in silence. When we came closer when we could see Germans we began to shout to scare them and it worked: they left their trenches retreating - it was scaring when a brutal crowd moved on them. I joined the Party at the front. My father was a dedicated communist. I became a traitor of the motherland for struggling for communist ideas. I was absorbed in them. I joined the Party for ideal considerations.

They write in books that the infantry received vodka before attacks. We didn't. In winter we got our daily rations regardless of attacks. We always had almost a canister of vodka in our intelligence platoon. Our sergeants were smart. They submitted requests for a ration for 50 people before a battle and after the battle there were about 20 survivors and there were always sufficient quantities of vodka available, but I don't remember any drinking excesses. Well, we could drink 200 grams instead of the standard 100. There was the tradition to drop awards in the mess tin to 'wash it out'.

The war in Eastern Prussia was over in April. We moved to the seashore. We stayed in a nice resort town: gorgeous houses, furnished and vacant. There were still battles near Berlin, but we liquidated all Germans in Eastern Prussia. I was under arrest on Victory Day [23](#). We felt like the war was over for us, even though there were battles near Berlin or Vienna - this was far from where we were. It lasted about two days, when we were told that we were to attend mandatory political classes. In the morning my commanding officer gave me the schedule. We had been on battlefields, when now we had to attend a class with the title 'Sleep and security'. My platoon and I went to a forest, took off our boots and leg wrappings and relaxed on the grass. However, we were intelligence troopers and we watched around to be on the alert.

On the 2nd day of training an inspector arrived from the general staff office. I noticed somebody approaching us, looked at my watch - it was the time for a three-minute break according to the schedule. I approached the inspector to explain that we were having a class and then there was a break. 'Why don't you order 'Attention?' I explained that this order wasn't supposed to be given during a break and there was loud snoring around. Formally they couldn't forward any charges, but they still gave me three days of house arrest. This happened on 8th to 9th May 1945. This was a punishment for officers. There were no guards, but I wasn't supposed to leave the house.

I was taken to a nice house, my guys brought wine and food there. I was eating, when I heard shooting. There were even heavy cannons shooting and air rockets. My commander came running in. 'Why are you sitting here? It's the victory; that supersedes everything!' I had a box full of German air rockets on my vehicle. I opened it to shoot color rockets. Basically, we celebrated the victory. A few days later we were ordered to relocate to Königsberg for a parade of the garrison. Marshal Vasilevskiy received it. I was a leading singer in the regiment. We sang naughty songs: 'when a gypsy man threw a gypsy woman onto a bench'. Our commanders and we liked these songs a lot. Then we were taken to Mongolia by train.

I didn't know much about what the Germans did to Jews during the war. We knew that they exterminated prisoners, as a rule, and that there were death camps. In the army I had 'Russian' indicated in my documents since if God forbid I would have got in captivity, everybody knew it was sure death, but we didn't know any details about the camps, crematoria, six million of killed old people and children. [Being a Jew meant being surely destined to death in case they were

captured, and for a Russian there was still hope to survive.] Nationality didn't matter in the army. Personal values mattered. There was a mixture of nationalities in our units. Everybody was aware I was a Jew wherever I served, but there was no segregation in this regard. It was only after the war that anti-Jewish attitude on a large scale appeared. There were many Jews at the front. All boys in our family who came of the recruitment age were at the front. My two cousin brothers perished: one near Stalingrad and the other one near Moscow.

I had several wounds, seven of them severe, during the war. I was wounded in my shoulder three times, one splinter wounded me in the abdominal cavity, I still have 20 splinters in my head, talocrural and in the shoulder, but in general, I was lucky and young, and the wounds healed fast. They healed and I still run around today or pretend to be running around.

I have orders and medals. I have 22 governmental awards in total. There were awards for combat actions. I received an Order of the Great Patriotic War, 2nd class after we repelled a tank attack in Eastern Prussia. [Editor's note: established 20th May 1942. These orders were awarded to officers and men of the Soviet army, navy, and to partisans for personal courage and bravery as well as to those who contributed to the success of an operation. The 2nd class award was issued over 1,028,000 times.] I also have an Order of the Red Star [22](#) for Königsberg and two medals for combat service. [Editor's note: established 17th October 1938. This medal was awarded for a person's contribution to the success of a combat mission and for the enhancement of the combat readiness of the military units. The silver medal with the inscription 'For distinguished service in battle' over a saber crossed with a rifle. The medal was awarded over 5,000,000 times.] And I have a Mongolian order for the defeat of Japanese troops.

The trip from Königsberg across the victorious country to Japan took us a whole month. How we were met! There were flowers thrown at us, people were meeting their liberators at stations and in towns. They were happy that we had won and that this horrific war was over and brought flowers to meet the trains from the front, in which the military were returning home. We passed villages where there was nothing left and they were throwing us carrots. Tears filled our eyes: people didn't have anything, but shared the last things they had with us. In Darasun [about 4,500 km east of Moscow] we got off and walked across Buriatia and Mongolia to Choybalsan [about 5,000 km east of Moscow]. We encamped in Mongolia. There was general staff of the Zabaikalskiy front. We were told lies during our trip. We were told that we were taken for reformation, and that we needed to take everything we could from Prussia since at the place we were heading to we were to dig earth huts. We loaded wood, a grand piano and even vehicles; everything we could. We didn't know where we were going.

Before our departure a high official from the political department started his fable about correspondence with relatives. I wrote my mother every day from the front and the field mail operated well, but this queer man told us to not drop our letters in mail boxes at stations, but hand them to field mail reps.

Our commanding officer didn't want us to write about our destination. My mother all of a sudden received my letter from Königsberg saying that I was alive and healthy and would come home soon, while she hadn't received a letter from me in three months. No letters that we took to the field mail office had been sent. Later censors thoroughly checked my letters from Choybalsan crossing out any mention of my whereabouts. However, knowing the Russian characters, I

mentioned the name of the town five to six times in a letter. They crossed it out at the beginning and at the end of the letter, but missed the middle part. Our commanding officers got married during the trip. We had a grand piano with us and there were girls joining us on our way. We sang and danced. When we approached the border with Mongolia, we were told that only the military, but not their girlfriends would be allowed across the border. When we arrived in Mongolia, it turned out that Mongolians paid one horse for a binocular.

They could see a rider at quite a distance through the binocular. We didn't need a horse, so we traded a binocular for money and bought alcohol. We were in Choybalsan for about a month. Troops for the attack on Japan were gathered there. We were in the reserve of the Zabaykalskiy Front and were waiting for the declaration of war. There was one army protecting our borders located in Mongolia throughout the war. When we arrived this army moved to the border, and we became a front line reserve. I admired the fortifications that the army made with a few stories, the passages in the sand, shelters, and everything was skillfully camouflaged.

The war with Japan [23](#) lasted three months. On 10th August Japan capitulated. On 3rd September I received a medal for the victory over Japan. We struggled against Japan on the territory of China. We actually had no combat actions. There was major Japanese resistance in the direction of Vladivostok where they held strong, but what could they do here with the open steppe and a tank army attacking? We had all cannons and heavy artillery with us in Eastern Mongolia. Of course, we had losses. There's even a monument to those who perished in the Far East - there were about 15 of them. This happened at the time, when the 11th army alone lost over 10,000 during the attack on Königsberg. The Japanese were very scared of getting captured by Mongolians. They were so wild. They didn't give food to prisoners. And they threw a loop around their neck, riding their horses and the prisoners were running behind.

Our troops didn't torture prisoners. There were Japanese officers supervising Japanese captives, and our troops even left their cold weapons with them. There were only our guards watching that our soldiers didn't rob the Japanese captives. The Japanese had watches that became trophies. I knew that Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan, but this was somewhere far away from me. We actually didn't read newspapers and had no idea about how deadly dangerous nuclear weapons were. There were no such celebrations like there had been after the victory over Germany. There was triumph that it was so easy to destroy a big empire. There was no immediate demobilization, but I got lucky. There was an order issued saying that military who had three or more wounds were subject to immediate demobilization, and I had seven.

After the war

After the war with Japan we were grouped based on the locations we came from and sent home by trains. The trains were slow and I was eager to get home as soon as possible. I changed for a courier train to Moscow. I was rich when I came to Moscow. The money that I brought with me lasted in the family for quite some time. I had shoes and clothes and received cards. [Editor's note: the card system was introduced to directly regulate food supplies to the population by food and industrial product rates. There were cards for workers, non-manual employees and dependents in the USSR. Food products were distributed per food cards or coupons. There was nothing in stores to buy for money. Food cards were issued at work, in colleges or in social services.] We were paid at the front, but we hardly ever spent this money. Before going to the East we received bags of

money: there was guard and field money, in Germany we were paid in occupational marks, and in Mongolia we received tugriks. In Manchuria we received Chang Kay Shi Chinese dollars. In Moscow I exchanged these currencies to rubles.

My family was happy that I was back home. We lived in the apartment where my aunts Rosa and Sophia accommodated us. My friends and my sister's friends, the former exiles who had no place to live and our relatives always found shelter in this apartment. There is the friendly atmosphere surrounding anybody who comes into this apartment. I decided to go to college, but first I had to obtain a secondary school certificate. I had finished seven years at school. I passed school exams for three years. This was 1947 when specialists for atomic energy studies were in great demand. I entered the Engineering and Physics Faculty of Moscow Applied Physics College. Right upon my admission the period of exclusion of Jews from science began: the campaign against cosmopolitans [24](#). I remember Professor Landa, who had organized this college, was fired. Professor Haikin, an outstanding mechanic theoretician quit his job.

I studied well and made reports in our mathematics club. I was a head student of the course. When we were in our third year of studies students began to obtain permits to do sensitive work. I was invited to the special department where they told me that they could not allow me access to secrets due to my name. I had too many sins according to their thinking. My father having been arrested as an enemy of the people and I having being in prison and probably my Jewish identity also played its role. I went to study in the Moscow Machine Instrumental College [STANKIN], the faculty of machines and technology of the foundry production. This was one of the few higher educational institutions where Jews were admitted. There were many Jewish lecturers and students. As a result, there were such good results, that graduates from STANKIN were in great demand. Our students' life was wonderful. It was easier for me to study there. It took me one or two hours to prepare for exams. I went in for tourism and mountain climbing. In winter I guided groups of skiers to Moscow region. I was head man in the group, editor of the wall newspaper and chairman of the tourism and mountain climbing club. I organized many tours, became master of sports in tourism and traveled to the Far North in the country. I was a reliable leader. There were no accidents in my groups and I was often invited to supervise training in the Caucasus and Altay.

In 1949 my mother died after being severely ill. My mother wasn't a public person. She never joined the party or any public activities. She liked everybody, supported and helped all. One of my strong impressions was that during my mother's funeral: the hall of the crematorium was overcrowded, many people grieved after my mother. This was the kind of person she was. My stepfather Veniamin Lyulkin lived with us for a long time and was the head of the family. He worked in the ministry of bread products where he was deputy chief of department of acceptance and placement of bread. In 1952 he remarried, received a new apartment and moved there with his wife, but he continued to be a friend of the family. He died of a heart attack in 1960. Aunt Rosa had fracture of the femoral neck and was bedridden ever since. She died in 1963. Aunt Sophia got blind in the late 1950s, but she kept her sense of humor and nice attitude. She lived wrapped in Marianna and her nephews' care and love. She died in 1989. My sisters Victoria and Inga, my cousin sister Marianna and I have always been friends.

My older sister Victoria finished Moscow Polygraphist College and married Vladimir Zaitsev, a nice Russian guy, in 1946. She worked as an editor and a librarian. Her daughter's name is Yekaterina. Victoria died in 1996. My sister Inga graduated from the Geographical Faculty of Moscow

University. She worked as a geographer, married Igor Kontsebovskiy, also a Russian guy, and they live in harmony. She has two daughters: Yelena and Anna. She raises her grandson Yevgeniy, Anna's son.

The time of receiving mandatory job assignments [25](#) was coming close. I spent a lot of time with public activities, had all excellent marks, was editor of the faculty newspaper, a veteran of the war, a member of the party and I assisted the dean's office to eliminate lost hours in our studies. I believed I had all grounds to expect a good job assignment, but I was the last one to be called into the room. The meeting was chaired by the deputy minister of machine tool construction. He was a foundry man. Many years later I did joint work with him, and then he explained: 'Look, I had directions of the district party committee regarding all job assignments. It didn't matter what I knew or wanted. Everything was directed'. To cut this long story short: I was told that there were no vacancies in Moscow, though I was aware that the director of the scientific research institute of the foundry machine building [NIILITMASH] had forwarded a request for my assignment to his institute. I was assigned to work in Kolomna [a small town 50 km from Moscow], at the biggest plant of heavy machines. I realized it didn't make any sense to complain. When I came to the ministry to obtain a letter of assignment, they told me that the plant had refused to employ me. So they sent me to the Klinskiy, about 100 km from Moscow, to a machine repair plant, the last enterprise in the lists of our Ministry. They didn't know what a wonderful gift they prepared for me.

I went to the plant. Its director was a former foundry man. He appointed me chief of laboratory. This was good for a graduate since the others were just the lowest rate engineers in their scientific research institutes. This happened to be a nice job for all 'outcasts' that later developed into the best chief designers. There were literally trains of machines shipped to our plant under the reparation terms [from the beaten countries] and we restored them. I dealt with the best machines in the world. Soon I became supervisor of the foundry shop and then was chief of laboratory and supervisor at the same time. The director of the plant was a drunkard, but he was a great foundry specialist and we got along well. There is a German saying about the foundry men: 'It's a bad metal that doesn't pour and the foundry man who doesn't drink'.

Once we decided to celebrate my promotion. I went to buy more vodka in the café at the railway station. I bought two bottles. This was fall 1953, when there was amnesty and many criminals were released in Klin. [Editor's note: After Stalin had died in March 1953 he was succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev [26](#) as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The new leadership declared an amnesty for some serving prison sentences for criminal offences, announced price cuts, and relaxed the restrictions on private plots. De-Stalinization also put an end to the role of large-scale forced labor in the economy.] When I was going back, two men caught up with me. One of them took a knife out of his pocket demanding my coat from me. I grabbed a bottle and gave one of them a hard blow in his temple. He fell to the ground and another criminal ran away. The blow was so hard that even the bottle broke. I happened to be attacked by the criminals who had been released from jail. I killed one of them. The militia proved that I was defending myself and the case ended well for me. They found the knife with the criminal's fingerprints on it at the scene of crime. However, about two weeks later the captain of the militia office notified me that there was a gang of criminals in Klin planning to wreak vengeance and it would be better for me to leave town.

At that period there was an order issued by the government to send industrial engineers to kolkhozes and equipment yards. I wrote a letter to the central party committee informing them that I was ready to go to any distant kolkhoz and they assigned me to an equipment yard in Tajikistan. I worked there for four years. Then the equipment yards were closed. My wound on the hip opened and I was taking medical treatment in Moscow, when the director of NIILITMASH, who had known me since I was a student, offered me a job. I worked there from 1957 to 1996. There were many Jewish employees working in this institute. During the period of the suppression of Jews the NIILITMASH was allowed to employ Jews. This institute gathered such a brilliant team of designers that this industry, which was underdeveloped before, reached an internationally recognized level in the Soviet Union.

When I was employed there was one vacancy for a senior engineer. It was a lower position against my previous positions, but I agreed to take it. I finally got a chance to deal in the science that I had studied in college. Before the end of two years I was promoted to supervisor of a group, then chief of the laboratory, and then I won the competition for the position of chief of department and in this position I worked till I retired. I liked this job: firstly, I returned to Moscow and secondly, I got to work in science after I returned from a Tajik field. Actually, I reached the highest qualifications in my profession.

There were five laboratories in my department, about 50 people in each of them, I wrote manuals and other scientific books. My industry people still remember me and make agreements for writing books with me. There were different laboratories. There were international jobs related to specialization of cooperation of the production of foundry equipment. My department dealt in economics, specialization of cooperation and new equipment. We studied the best international practices and published recommendations about development of new equipment. Our department determined work directions for our institute and industry. I had serious scientific research works at the institute at the beginning of my career. There were several dissertations based on my ideas defended in the institute [see Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [27](#). Over 250 of my works were published, translated into foreign languages and published abroad. I didn't want to defend a dissertation. I earned sufficient money: I had my salary of chief of the department and lectured on foundry discipline in two higher educational institutions.

In the late 1980s the new era began when we stepped into capitalism in its wild form. There were all kinds of conflicts with the new management of the institute since I didn't agree with its financial policies. Our customers paid for the contracts completed by my department, and the managers took this money. I got so sick and tired of it that I quit my job at the institute in 1996 and retired. I have agreements that I execute through the association of foundry experts, and I get paid for this work. These are research works on sales markets in Russia or in the world for the products of the foundry industry and the cost of foundry products. Besides, I write manuals for foundry students.

I met my wife, Anna Tarskaya, nee Shamrai, on a hiking tour in 1952, when I worked as a senior instructor for tourists. I had high skills in orientation and azimuth orientation. I was 27 then. I looked well, was a strong and quick young man. I had finished college and was chief of laboratory. I was chief of the whole tourist hiking base and I chose the prettiest girls and the strongest young men for my group. I liked my future wife Anna. She was a small, pretty slim girl, but very quick and business-like. We saw each other for a year until 1953, when I had to leave Moscow for Tajikistan. When I returned I thought Anna had forgotten me, though I remembered her. Anna was Russian,

but nationality didn't matter to me. I called her and we met and began to see each other again. Then we got married in 1957. There was a big joyous wedding to which Anna's friends and my relatives and friends came, but of course, there were no Jewish or Russian traditions observed.

Anna's family came from Kaluga province. Her grandfather, a poor villager from Vinnitsa province, moved to Kaluga province with his family in the late 19th century where he bought a plot of land. Though his successors joined a kolkhoz after the Revolution of 1917, and Anna's mother was a milkmaid there, they were still declared kulaks [28](#), and thus subject to dispossession. They escaped to Moscow. Anna's father and mother went to work at the plant of rubber products 'Kauchuk'.

There were five children in the family: Tatiana, Maria, Ivan, Pyotr, and the oldest Anna, born in 1925. Her mother had no education, but she was a wise woman and helped her children to get a higher education, although Anna couldn't get a higher education because of the war. Anna's mother worked in the metallization of rubber and was awarded orders for her performance. Anna worked at the bullet plant during the war. This was terrible work: they worked on the conveyor placing bullets into cases. Every day another girl lost her finger in an accident. Anna was accurate and hardworking. The NKVD office noticed her and sent her to a course of typewriting, stenography and German. She finished the course with honors and spoke fluent German. She was sent to Germany on an intelligence task at the end of the war. She worked for an organization purchasing and shipping out documentation and consumables of missile equipment. Their organization was disclosed and she saved them from execution by writing an explanatory note that those were outdated documents that had been shipped and lost. In Germany she worked for the Soviet Military administration and they didn't dismiss her for a long time as they were interested in her knowledge of all German office and bureaucratic rules. She returned to Russia in 1947. In Moscow she was chief of department 1 [secret] in an academic institute and later she became human resource manager. My parents and hers didn't mind that I was a Jew and she was Russian.

Her sister Tatiana is also married to a Jewish man. We lived many years together, but there were never any signs of anti-Semitic expressions or displeasure. We were one wonderful family. My family was happy about my marriage. He finally got married! There was no question of whether I had a Jewish or a Russian wife. What kind of Jews were we?! I've already mentioned that nine out of twelve children of my grandmother were in exile. They were internationalists. There was no Russian or Jewish spirit in our family. We didn't teach our daughter Jewish traditions and she didn't identify herself as a Jew.

At first we rented an apartment. Then my stepfather received an apartment and remarried. Anna and I moved into his wife's room. Soon my wife received an apartment from her institute. This is where I live now. In 1960 our daughter Natasha was born. She grew up a cheerful and quick girl. She studied well. At school she was chess champion. When she was small we rented a dacha [cottage] near Moscow and later we spent vacations in recreation centers. I often went to the Crimea or the Caucasus as an instructor of tourism and mountaineering. The organizers of these trainings paid for my trips. My wife and I like traveling across the country. We took many tours. Now, as an invalid of the war, I receive tickets to stay in health centers. Last summer I flew to Vladivostok, to the division in which I served during the war. This year I want to go to Kamchatka to look at geysers. I had friends who worked for foreign companies that I worked with. They invited me to visit them. I traveled to Norway and Germany. I made a tour to Italy and traveled all over the country. We had many friends at work. We often got together and visited each other.

My wife and I lived in harmony. After finishing school she went to study in Moscow College of Fine Chemical Technology. She studied in the evening department and went to work at daytime. After finishing the college she went to work at the academic institute. She worked well and was going to defend a dissertation of candidate of sciences when perestroika [29](#) began. She began to receive a very low salary at the institute. Our daughter already had two children. Natasha works in the business department of the Tax Police Fund. I've never asked her how much she earns, but since she goes abroad with her children twice a year, and they have nice furniture and computers at home, and everything is super, I believe she earns all right. Natasha got married in 1980. Her husband, Alexandr Kurilenko is a chemist, a military, worked in the space industry and was responsible for fueling missiles. Recently he retired in the rank of colonel. He is Ukrainian, but his mother is half-Ukrainian and half-Jewish.

My grandchildren are a mixture of Russian-Ukrainian-Jewish blood. My granddaughter Maya is a 4th-year student of the psychology department of the Jewish University. She is now working on a thesis on Jewish subjects. She studies Hebrew, the history of Jewish people and knows all Jewish traditions, though they don't celebrate Jewish holidays at home. The Jewry has returned to my granddaughter. My grandson Misha is a 3rd-year student in college.

In 1999 my wife fell ill with rectum cancer. She lived three more years after the surgery, but then she had metastasis. She had another surgery, got weaker, lost her ability to speak and orientation. She died in hospital in 2001. I buried her in the Hovanskoye town cemetery in Moscow.

Basically, I'm positive about perestroika, but what kind of perestroika is this? This is just a many-year destruction of the country's industry, that's how I call this period. I am an economist. I wouldn't want to say that everything was fine during the Soviet power, but when Kosygin was in power, there was discipline. [Editor's note: Kosygin, Aleksey (1904-1980): state and party leader 1961-1964, 1st deputy chairman of the council of ministers, 1964-1980 chairman of the council of ministers USSR.] There was a five-year plan [29](#), and he never allowed a single kopeck for anything beyond this plan. If a ministry wanted the construction of something they were to provide documents to prove that they stopped constructing another facility. Although, in my opinion, there were huge amounts spent on defense that they might have given away to the people.

When the USSR broke up, the industry went down to 10 per cent of the Soviet period. The industry was destroyed and where were they supposed to take the money? There might have been a tough economy and it might have been wrong during the Stalin rule, but there was iron discipline. Within five years after the war the level of production exceeded the prewar levels. Now it's been ten years since perestroika [editors note: Perestroika started in 1985, after Gorbachev came to power], and the Russian President Mr. Putin tells us that industry has increased by 10%. I feel ashamed to hear this - I would spit into his eyes. Ten per cent of what? Of the 10% that it was dumped to in the 1990s? There are many grave mistakes made just because of misunderstanding the situation. The power allowed certain manufacturers to make big money, and the working class and working people became miserably poor.

When Jews got their state in 1948, I felt very proud. I perceive this state as a part of myself, I'm proud of the military successes of the Jewish people, but I've never strived to go there [Israel]. Just to go there on a visit maybe, but nothing else. I'm a Jew. I was born to a Jewish family. Before the Great Patriotic War I identified myself as just a Soviet person. There were children from Brazil,

Latvia and Germany in my class. There was never an issue of nationality. I've never kept my Jewish identity a secret.

Before receiving my first passport at the age of 16, I wrote in my application form that I was a Jew. After I returned from the army there was reregistration. The militia asked me while looking into my old documents why it was written that I was Russian, when I was a Jew by my passport. I said that they had to register me as a Jew. I felt patriotic about my people at the moment and believed I had no right to reject my belonging to the nation. I grew more conscious and restored my nationality in my documents. Since Jews were suppressed in their rights I believed that I didn't have to play tricks and hide away. Even if I don't know Yiddish or Hebrew, the Old Testament or Jewish laws, by my nature and in essence I identify myself as a Jew.

My roots are in Russia, I was educated here, I worked in this country on many jobs and positions: as stoker, tractor operator, sewing cotton... I was an honored mechanic of the republic and I worked 40 years to support the foundry machine building. I struggled for this land. Foreign countries still believe me to be the greatest expert in foundry equipment; I have 22 governmental awards from this country. I don't think Israel to be my state. I'm a citizen of Russia.

Glossary

1 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

2 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Odessa

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were heders in 19 prayer houses.

6 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)

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

7 Realschule

Secondary school for boys. Students studied mathematics, physics, natural history, foreign languages and drawing. After finishing this school they could enter higher industrial and agricultural educational institutions.

8 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.

9 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

10 Communal apartment

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

11 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

12 NKVD

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

13 Enemy of the people

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

14 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

15 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.

16 KGB

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

17 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.

18 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.

19 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.

20 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.

21 Blockade of Leningrad

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

22 Order of the Red Star

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

23 The Japanese army attacked the USSR in 1939

In the summer of 1939 the Japanese army attacked Mongolian Republic territory, which had a union agreement with USSR, on the river Halkhin-Gol. The Japanese were defeated by a joint Soviet-Mongol army.

24 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'.

25 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.

26 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.

27 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

28 Kulaks

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

29 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.

30 Five-year plan

five-year plans of social and industrial development in the USSR an element of directive centralized planning, introduced into economy in 1928. There were twelve five-year periods between 1929-90.