

# Faina Gheller

Saratov, Russia

Interviewer: Svetlana Kogan

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*Faina Gheller is a big woman with a sporty figure. She was born in Saratov.*

*She lives with her husband in a three-bedroom apartment.*

*Their sons and their families also live in Saratov not far from their parents.*

*Faina is a pensioner, but she still works as director of the club for elderly people in Hased.*

*We met in Hased.*

*Faina was glad to share her life story with us.*

*Faina is very sociable and creative: she composes poems, writes screenplays, and organizes celebrations and concerts.*

*She knows how to work with people and involve volunteers in the Hased activities.*



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- **My family background**

My paternal grandfather Israel Zelvianski and my paternal grandmother Rochl-Beilia Zelvianskaya lived in Grodno [in Belarus, over 1000 km from Moscow]. I have never been there or seen my grandparents and I have no information about the town. My grandparents were born in 1870s and were killed in 1920s, during the Antonov uprising [Antonovschina - uprising of peasants in Tambov and Voronezh regions against the Soviet power (1920-1921). They struggled for freedom of trade. This movement was called after its leader A.S. Antonov. It was suppressed by the Red army under command of M. Tukhachevskiy.

The leaders of this uprising were executed.] in Tambov region. Regretfully, I don't know my grandmother's maiden name or her family. My father told me very little about her. My grandmother and grandfather's sisters and brothers died before I was born. My father told me that grandmother Rochl-Beilia wore customary Jewish clothes: a long skirt and long-sleeved dresses. She wore a kerchief, but no wig. My grandfather Israel wore beard and a hat. He wore a shirt, vest, trousers and boots. I would think my grandfather was a tailor since my father Naum Zalivanski (my father changed his surname during the Civil War [1](#), most likely for more common sounding; he was

Zelvianski before), was a tailor. Grandmother Rochl-Beilia was a housewife. They spoke Yiddish and knew Polish.

My father told me they lived in a wooden house with three small rooms. Their biggest value in the family was a sewing machine. There was a well in the yard from where they fetched water. Here was a wood stoked stove in the house. They didn't have a garden, but there was a shed where they kept chickens. They were not wealthy. The family wasn't religious.

They observed Jewish traditions, but it was most likely their tribute to traditions and provincial way of life. They went to the synagogue on Friday and on Jewish holidays. They celebrated Sabbath, but didn't follow kashrut. They celebrated all holidays at home. My grandfather Israel Zelvianski had progressive opinions, he was a Soviet person believing religion to be something obsolete and disappearing, something that was on the way of life and progress, but he never joined any political parties or public or cultural organizations.

There were 5 children in the family. My father's older brother whose name I don't know was born in Grodno in 1898. In 1917 he emigrated to Canada. From there he sent one photograph and there was no more information about him.

The rest of my father's brothers and sisters were born in the following sequence: My father's brother Isaac Zalivanski (during the Civil War he changed his surname to Zelvianski for more common pronunciation) was born in Grodno in 1903. During the Civil War he was in the Red Army. He was a communist and a Party official. He had a number of jobs. He had two children: his daughter Mirah Nosovich, nee Zalivanskaya, and son Boris Zalivanski who works as chief doctor in Lipetsk [about 400 km from Moscow]. We didn't have contacts with them. Isaac died in Tambov [450 km from Moscow] in 1986.

My father's brother Boris Zelvianski was born in Grodno in 1914. After his parents died he was raised in a children's home in Moscow. Then he lived in Tambov and was a tailor. He died in Voroshilovgrad [Lugansk at present, about 1000 km from Moscow]. He has a daughter named Nelia. She is an obstetrician in Lugansk. We didn't have contacts with him. He died in Voroshilovgrad in 1995.

My father's sister Bella Zelvianskaya in Grodno in 1916. She was raised in a children's home in Moscow. She married Grigori Levin, a Jew, a major in the Red Army, and stayed to live in Moscow. She worked in the department for the Party personnel inspections in the Central Committee of the Communist Party. She had a son named Victor Levin. He is an electrician and lives in Moscow. Bella died in Moscow in 1999. We didn't have contacts with her or her son.

My father Naum Zalivianski was born in Grodno in 1900. His mother tongue was Yiddish, but he could also speak Russian, but he could hardly write in it. He studied three years in cheder in his town. He could not continue his studies. He had to go to work to help his parents to support the family. He accepted the [October ] Revolution of 1917 [2](#) enthusiastically.

During the Civil War he and his brother served in the Red Army. He volunteered to the Red Army. He was a private in the 10th infantry regiment. His regiment was deployed near his town. After another attack of White Guards gangs [3](#) his neighbors decided to rob his parents' home. Someone informed him about their intentions and he managed to protect his parents. However, there was

another time when he couldn't do anything to prevent attacks and that time only his younger brother and sister survived and were sent to a children's home in Moscow.

The other members of the family were killed by bandits. He found his brother and sister in Moscow and supported them until they grew old enough to take care of themselves. My father demobilized in 1921 and returned to Tambov where he worked as a tailor: he cut fabrics in shops and also worked at home to earn more. In 1930 he married a Jewish woman named Rosa (I don't know her maiden name). In 1931 their daughter Mirah was born. In 1933 they moved to his wife's relatives in Saratov [about 900 km from Moscow]. Shortly afterward his wife died. He lived with his deceased wife's relatives before he met my mother.

My maternal grandmother Basia-Yonta Weisman was presumably born on the outskirts of Kamenets-Podolsk in Ukraine [about 1500 km from Moscow] in 1879. She came from a family with many children. As I understood from what my aunts and mother said she was the only daughter from her father's first marriage and the rest of the children were her stepbrothers and sisters. I don't know when or for what reason her mother died.

My mother was a small child and could hardly remember her mother. My grandmother's father must have remarried shortly after his wife's death. My grandmother's stepmother was a Jewish woman. They began to have their own children. The family was poor and to get rid of my grandmother her stepmother made her marry the first man that proposed to her: he was a lame redhead Jew that came from Austria.

I don't know any details about how my maternal grandfather Mendel Weisman, born in 1873, moved to Russia from Austria. One way or another he occurred to be there and my grandmother married him at the age of 16. They treated each other with respect. My grandfather was 6 years older than my grandmother. He was a shoemaker in Kamenets-Podolsk.

In 1913 he was authorities forced him to move to Saratov for some suspicions that they had, but I think he was sent there due to his Austrian origin rather than any revolutionary ideas. I don't think he had any revolutionary ideas. He was a common shoemaker and a deeply religious man. From what I know my grandmother didn't have any contacts with her family afterward and I have no information about them, therefore.

In Saratov they lived in Nemetskaya Street (nowadays it is a pedestrian avenue in the very center of Saratov). I don't know whether they had a house or an apartment, but they didn't have any garden, that's for sure. Grandfather had a small shoes repair shop in his street. He was a skilled shoemaker, but they his family lived from hand to mouth.

My grandmother wanted to raise his children religious, but he couldn't afford to give them good education. However, his children were taught to read and write and read religious books that they had at home. I saw my grandfather saying a prayer every morning with his tefillin and tallit on. He took a prayer book and kept swinging to the tune of words that he pronounced. He always had a tzitzit under his jacket. He wore a hat. He had a big red beard, but no payes, I think.

My grandmother wore long skirts and long-sleeved dresses and a kerchief. She was an exemplary Jewish wife. She followed kashrut and observed all Jewish traditions. Once I attended seder in my grandparents' home. There was a long table in their house. My strict and serious read bearded

grandfather sat at the head of the table and the rest of the family were sitting by their seniority. My grandmother brought in a bowl of nicely smelling chicken broth and other dishes...

Their attitude toward the revolution of 1917 was quiet. They accepted it as something inevitable and it didn't change their way of life. People needed to have their shoes fixed regardless of the regime and besides, their family had nothing to lose.

During the Great Patriotic War [4](#) they lived in Saratov. Mendel and Basia-Yonta Weisman also resided in Ufa [about 1400 km from Moscow], Chernovtsy [about 1200 km from Moscow], Zastavna [about 1150 km from Moscow] and Kuibyshev, present Samara [over 800 km from Moscow] with their daughter Chava. They moved to their children's families to help them with raising their grandchildren. My grandfather died in Kuibyshev in 1959 and my grandmother died in Chernovtsy in 1955.

They had eight children. One of them, born in 1916, died in infancy. Their children were raised in the religious environment and were taught to observe all Jewish traditions and rules. Their mother tongue was Yiddish. All boys were circumcised and went to cheder. Girls also studied at cheder for girls [5](#). When they grew up and received secular education, and also, considering that they lived in the socialist countries, my mother's brothers and sisters, like the majority of Jews of their generation in the USSR gave up observing Jewish traditions. Their families did not celebrate Jewish holidays and none of them went to the synagogue.

My mother Bertha Weisman was born in Kamenets-Podolsk in 1903. She was the first child in this family. My mother's sister Chava was born in 1904. She married Michael Gaitner, an Austrian Jew that sell things at the market. They lived in Kuibyshev. Chava was a housewife. They had two children: their first daughter Tatiana Lanzman (nee Gaitner) was a dentist, her husband Michael Lanzman - was a foreman at the bearing plant in Samara, they have a daughter named Evgenia Baskina (nee Lanzman); second daughter Manya (nee Gaitner), husband Kim, daughter Lilia, I don't remember the surname.

The next was Michael Weisman, born in 1906. He lived in Leningrad, finished a Mining College and worked as an engineer. He perished during defense of Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War in 1941. He was single.

In 1908 Faina (her Jewish name was Feigele) Weisman was born. She married a Jewish man named Chaim Chait and moved to some place in Ukraine. She worked as an accountant, I don't know where. My grandfather and grandmother lived with her. During the Great Patriotic War she evacuated to Saratov with her family and her parents. From there her husband went to the front when she was pregnant expecting their first son. After the war her husband returned from the front and they moved to Chernovtsy in Western Ukraine [about 1200 km from Moscow]. I don't know for what reason they moved. Some time afterward Faina divorced her husband and went to work as an accountant in Zastavna village near Chernovtsy. She moved to this village with her children and my maternal grandparents.

In 1987 she moved to America with her children. Faina died in America in 1990. Her sons Nathan (Natsik) Chait, born in 1942, and Efim Chait, born in 1946, live in New York, America. Nathan is married and they have a son named Garik Chait. Nathan is a cabinetmaker. He works in a

carpenter workshop. Efim wife's name is Raisa Chait. They have two daughters: Ludmila (nee Chait) married a man from Chernovtsy; as for their younger daughter, I don't remember her name. We do not have any contacts with them.

My mother's brother Alexadr (Jewish name Shneer) Weisman was born in Saratov in 1914. He finished an affiliate of Moscow College of Railroad Transport in Saratov in 1935 and was chief of Saratov railroad. In 1937, during the period of mass arrests [Great Terror] [6](#) he was arrested after an accident near Saratov railroad station. He was accused of sabotage, but released half a year later since his guilt was not proved. As far as I know my other relatives didn't suffer during this period.

In 1940 he married Faina (Feigele) Gorelik, a Jewish woman. She finished a medical College and got a job assignment in Ufa. I don't know what Alexandr did for a living. Shortly before the war in 1941 they returned to Saratov. When the war began he worked as an engineer at the 'Cracking' refinery. He was released from military service.

In 1942 their older son Michael Weisman was born. He lives in St. Petersburg. His wife Galina is a Jew. She works as a programmer. Their son Ilia Weisman is an attorney. Their son Alexandr, Zalman Weisman, born in 1951, lives in Saratov. He was deputy director of Gasatomatika institute and now he is a private entrepreneur, a grain dealer. His wife Bella Falikova, a Jew, is deputy director of a music school and their daughter Irina Weisman is a postgraduate student of the Philological Faculty of Saratov State University. Alexandr Weisman died in Saratov in 1988. Photo 6

My mother's sister Bella (nee Weisman), born in Saratov in 1918, finished an accounting school and married a Romanian Jewish man. I don't know his name. In 1943 their son Michael was born. In 1950 their family moved to Chernovtsy. My maternal grandmother and grandfather moved with them. During the Great Patriotic War Bella was in Saratov. She worked as an accountant. Her son Michael is chief of construction trust in Saratov. His wife Larisa is Russian. We do not have any contacts with them. Bella died in Chernovtsy in 1983.

My mother's brother Arkadi (Jewish name Abram) Weisman, born in Saratov in 1919, finished a Construction College. During the Great Patriotic War he was an air force mechanic at the Leningrad Front. In 1947 he came to Saratov and in 1950 he moved to Chernovtsy with his family. His first wife Bella is a Jewish woman from Bessarabia [7](#). They adopted an orphan child from a children's home, but divorced shortly afterward. His second wife Tunia Weisman, a Jew, was a secretary. She had a son from her first marriage. Tunia and Arkadi had a daughter named Darina. She lives in America. Arkadi died in Chernovtsy in 1986.

My mother Bertha Zalivanskaya finished three years of cheder for girls in Kamenets-Podolsk. This is all education she got. She was the oldest child and had to help her mother about the house. Her mother tongue was Yiddish. She spoke poor Russian. At the age of 16 she married Michael Rabinovich, Jew and a communist. They were introduced to each other by matchmakers and grandmother and grandfather, therefore, gave their consent to their marriage. My mother also got fond of revolutionary ideas.

In 1920 they moved to Tsaritsyn [renamed to Stalingrad, present-day Volgograd, about 1000 km from Moscow], where Michael Rabinovich held an important Party position at a plant. My mother

was a housewife. She observed Jewish traditions in secret from her husband. She lived with her husband for about 10 years. They didn't have children. He died of consumption that developed from his stay in tsarist prisons when he was young.

After Michael Rabinovich died my mother returned to her parents in Saratov where she worked as a seamstress in a shop. For her outstanding performance she received a room in a former two-story merchant's stone house in Nizhniaya Street. The house was divided into cells of rooms. There was a window and a half in my mother's room. My mother was an activist and spoke at meetings on Soviet holidays, although I don't know who could understand her poor Russian with a strong Jewish accent. She wore a red kerchief that was in fashion at that time.

In 1934 she married my father Naum Zalivanski. They met through matchmakers that was quite a custom with Jews at that period of time. They registered their marriage in a registry office. They were Komsomol members [8](#) and activists and they didn't have a Jewish wedding. They invited their closest ones to a small wedding dinner. They didn't have any photographs of the wedding. My father had a daughter from his first marriage. Her name was Mirah. My father and Mirah moved into my mother's 16-square-meter room in Nizhniaya Street. There was a 12-square-meter kitchen with no windows.

My stepsister Mirah was born in Tambov in 1931 [800 km from Moscow]. She finished a Russian grammar school for girls. She glued inner soles at the shoe factory. She got married through matchmakers in Vilnius in 1953. Her husband's name was Meyer Vilenchik. I don't know what he did to earn their living. Mirah was a housewife. The family of Meyer Vilenchik was shot in the ghetto in Vilnius in 1942. He was the only survivor. A Lithuanian woman rescued him when he was a boy. His hair turned gray after he witnessed the shooting. He saw many terrible things.

When he married my stepsister he was eager to move to Israel. He left Russia in 1955. They moved to Poland with their daughter Malka and adopted Polish citizenship and from there they had no problem with moving to Israel. Their daughter Lisa was born there. Lisa lives in a kibbutz in Neheva and Malka lives in Petah Tikvah. Malka works as a medical nurse in a hospital. They can speak very poor Russian. Mirah died in Israel in 1968 at the age of 37.

My mother didn't have children with her first husband and she believed she couldn't have children at all. For this reason she married a widower with a child. They didn't marry for love, but they respected each other. My mother loved her stepdaughter. Then my parents got three children of their own. After they were born my mother quit the factory and became a housewife. My father was the breadwinner in the family.

My older brother Israel Zalivanski was born in Saratov in 1935. According to customs he had brit milah on the eighth day. My brother finished a grammar school for boys in Saratov in 1952 and then he finished Saratov Electric Engineering College in 1956. In 1961 he married a Jewish girl from Tambov. He met his wife Bronislava, nee Deivt, through matchmakers. He was assistant shop supervisor in Saratov radio equipment plant. She worked as a teacher of mathematic at school.

They had two daughters. Their older daughter Marina Novikova (nee Zalivanskaya), born in 1963, works as a teacher of mathematic at the Jewish school in Saratov. Her husband Alexei Novikov is a TV camera operator in Saratov. They have two children: son Ilia, born in 1987, a pupil of the Jewish

school, and daughter Vera, born in 1992, studies in the Jewish school. Their younger daughter Nadezhda Khezron (nee Zalivanskaya), born in 1966, lives in Petah Tikvah in Israel. She is a programmer and her husband Yuri Khezron is electrician. Their daughter Yulia Khezron, born in 1990, studies at school. In 1992 Israel died of a stroke in Saratov. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish tradition.

My sister Lisa Zalivanskaya was born in 1937. She died in 1951 at the age of 14: she drowned in the Volga. She also studied in a grammar school for girls.

- **Growing up**

I, Faina Gheller, was born in Saratov on 30 April 1941. We lived in the street that led to the synagogue. Saratov was more like a big village than a town. Its center was near the Volga and we lived near the Sokolova Hill on the outskirts. Before 1937 the synagogue in Saratov was in Gogol Street. This was a beautiful two-storied building with nice interior and a gallery. Soviet authorities closed the synagogue during the period of struggle against religion [9](#). Then Jews collected contributions and bought a wooden house in Posadskogo Street and made it a prayer house that became a synagogue further on. I lived near that synagogue. There was a Sennoy Bazaar at the end of the street and this was the end of the town. Mr. Gorelik was acting rabbi and shochet. There was no mikveh. There was also a Jewish school in the town, but I didn't go there.

My mother often went to the synagogue. She and other women cleaned and washed the synagogue before holidays. Sometimes I went with my mother. My father didn't go to the synagogue. My mother had old religious books. She didn't give me to read these books and didn't teach me Yiddish. Although her Russian was very poor she only spoke Russian to me. My mother wrote her sisters in Yiddish.

Once a week my mother went shopping to the market. It took her all day long. Mother went there in the morning and came back with loads of things. As my father said: she wouldn't come home until she bargained with everyone. There were few markets in Saratov where farmers were selling their products. Before Jewish holidays mother bought live chickens and fattened them well for some time.

There were always 3-4 chickens in a cage in the yard. Before Pesach all Jewish housewives came to the market to buy chicken and there were Jewish intonations heard all across the market. They bargained for each chicken taking a close look at it to put down the price. Live chickens were taken to a shochet. I remember my mother turning a chicken over our heads and recited a prayer and then took the chicken to a shochet and he slaughtered it according to the rules [Editor's note: here the interviewee mixes two different traditions, one is the kapores and the other is taking alive chickens to the shochet.] There was a long hallway in the shochet's house where Jewish women were waiting for their turn. They discussed their families, children and recipes in Yiddish: a common women's talk. I understood what they talked about a little.

We had Russian, Mordvinian [people living in the Far East of Russia], Tatar and German neighbors, but most of our neighbors were Jewish. We got along well with our neighbors. Our neighborhood used to be an inn in the past. We lived in a two-storied brick house and other houses were wooden one-storied buildings. There were tenants even in basements. They escaped from occupied

territories during the Great Patriotic War. There were no conflicts. We celebrated holidays together: Soviet holidays, Christian Easter and Jewish holidays.

My mother always treated our neighbors to traditional Jewish food. Purim was the merriest holidays. All Jewish housewives made hamantashen and other pastries. In the morning we ran around with shelakhmones. Housewives never disclosed what they were going to make to make a surprise. It was the most delicious holiday, particularly enjoyed by children. I also remember Chanukkah. Everybody gave us Chanukkah gelt. My mother took me to the synagogue on holidays. Jewish housewives took their most delicious treatments to the synagogue. We didn't celebrate Sukkoth, perhaps, because it occurs in middle fall, when it was usually cold where we were, and it rained. Only recently I got to know about this holidays.

Pesach was a special holiday. My mother had a special soup bowl and a dish for gefilte fish. She bought live pike at the market to make gefilte fish. One day I went to the market with my mother. Early in the morning at the Peshiy Market all Jewish housewives were waiting for Russian fishermen chatting among themselves. The fishermen sold their fish right from their boats. We put this live fish in a basin with water and at night gefilte fish was made. And then finally this beauty appeared on the table: exclusively delicious!

My mother also made kneidlakh, kugel and matzah, of course. We had special plates for matzah. It was covered with a nice napkin. Matzah was made at the synagogue at all times. I remember that my mother brought a big pillowcase filled with matzah from the synagogue. She didn't let us eat it before the time came. She used to hide it, but we found it anyway and stole little pieces. Matzah was very delicious. We didn't eat any bread through 8 days of the holiday.

For some reason I only remember a delicious part of the holidays. Perhaps this was the main part that we observed, at least, I don't remember any rituals, prayers, blessings, and adults never told us anything about religion. This was more like a festive event, an occasion to eat heartily, invite guests and go out. This was overwhelming gluttony. We were not made to fast at Yom Kippur, and I don't think the adults fasted. Probably for this reason I don't remember major holidays.

Jewish families lived in their neighborhood near the synagogue. I would say that our street was a small Jewish town. Jews were craftsmen (shoemakers and tailors) and tradesmen. There was electricity, but there was no running water in the houses. We fetched water from pumps in the street. There were toilets outside. We had a big Russian wood stoked stove [10](#) in the house.

Our father installed a partial in our room. There was a bed where behind the curtain where my two sisters and I slept. My brother had an iron bed. When my brother grew bigger he had to curl up in this bed. My parents slept on a squeaking bed with knobles.

#### • **During and after the war**

I have dim memories about the Great Patriotic War. Soviet troops stopped Germans in 300 km from Saratov. I remember that the 'Cracking' refinery was continuously bombed. I only remember one air raid when I took hiding under the sewing machine. There was an air raid alarm howling and our neighbor boy Semyon was gathering splinters on the roof. There were many plants evacuated to Saratov. They were out of the town and were continuously bombed. During WWII my father was released from military service. He made uniforms for the front and my mother was at home with



the children.

Life after the war was hard. Our parents worked as much as they could to support us. Sometimes I woke up at night and saw my parents sewing. In the evenings we stood in lines to buy bread. Even at night we had to go for a call over in the line. Everybody, including babies, had his number written with a chemical pencil on the palm. Once my sister Mirah lost bread cards [the card system was introduced to directly regulate food supplies to the population by food and industrial product rates.

During and after the great Patriotic War there were cards for workers, non-manual employees and dependents in the USSR. The biggest rates were on workers' cards: 400 grams of bread per day]. My mother cried a lot and then took everything she could sell to the market. She bought a loaf of bread, but when we cut it there was a cloth inside. My mother cried again. Then she sold a piece of her jewelry and bought a can of oil. We had a little oil with onions and a little bread in a saucer for dinner. My father worked in a garment shop that made uniforms. He received food packages for workers.

At lunch my older sister and the other children went to the checkpoint of his shop. My father came out and gave us a bag with his food package trying to be unnoticed by the guard since it was not allowed to take food outside the shop. We ran home where my mother divided all food products equally between us and we also got a little bit of American chocolate milk.

My parents didn't have anything left for them from this food ration. There were stables in a neighboring street where they delivered oilcake and we went there to steal or beg it from stablemen. My mother cooked it and we had a meal. There was an oil factory in our street and its compassionate guards packed our pockets with sunflower oil seeds.

My brother Israel went in for free-style wrestling and was fond of billiards. He had many friends at school. They spent summer vacations together. My brother trained me as his sparring partner. My sisters and I helped my mother about the house. We embroidered, made dresses for our dolls and made our dolls. I got along well with my sisters. I had many friends that often came to play with me at home. We arranged a New Year party for all my friends at home.

I went to kindergarten at the age of 6 in 1947. Before this I stayed at home with mother or, if mother was busy, my older sister or brother looked after me or I was taken to my maternal grandmother who lived in Saratov at that time. We, children, made fairy tale performances and concerts in the yard. We made costumes and stage scenery ourselves and invited adults. We even made tickets and gave them to adults. We were a big success. I played with boys for the most part: we played 'highwaymen' and football where I was a goalkeeper.

There were nice dogs living in our yard. One of them, a black dog named Tsygan [gypsy] always lounged about a bakery standing on her hind legs begging for bread. What was really amazing about it was that it didn't eat bread, but brought it to the shed where we, kids, got together. The dog gave us bread probably thinking that we were its puppies. Once the dog even brought us a pie.

Once I began to beg my parents to buy me a musical instrument. Our neighbors from upstairs were German. Irina of this German family was very good at music always playing the violin or mandolin or guitar and she played beautifully. I got so obsessed with the idea of learning to play that I kept

asking my father to buy me an instrument. My mother was a theater-goer. She loved music and she never missed a single performance in the town. She adored violin. My father liked romances.

When working he always hummed something in Yiddish or Russian. So I kept egging him to buy me the violin. He saved some money and one day he said 'O'K, let's go to the store and I will buy you an instrument that you will chose'. I don't know why I set my eyes on a mandolin. I was trying to play it. Once I was trying to fit a key for 'Amurskiye volny' [Russian romance 'the waves of the Amur', a complicated piece of music], but I couldn't find the tune and I threw this mandolin so hard that it broke to pieces. This was the end of my musical efforts.

We were very poor. I went to school in 1948 wearing the dress that both of my sisters had worn before me. My mother patched it and my father made me a bag. Life was poor, but interesting. We had plain food, but it didn't get better in the 1950s.

I went to the Russian grammar school for girls. When I was in the 6th form schools for boys and girls merged and I was transferred to a different school. I had many friends at school, but only one girl was half-Jew in my class. Her name was Lida Gheller. Boys teased her, but I stood for her and fight with the boys. My best school friend was Rita Sukhanova. She lives in Kazan now. We've become lifetime friends. We exchange phone calls and every now and then we see each other. I had many friends beyond school. I went in for sports: skiing and volleyball in winter and racing bicycle in summer. I spent all my spare time in a gym. I took an active part in public life at school. I was chairman of a pioneer unit council, chairman of the school pioneer unit council, head girl of my class and chief of Komsomol unit. I was a strong girl and had authority in my class.

My favorite subject at school was mathematic. It was difficult at the beginning. Our teacher didn't like her subject or children. I don't remember her name. At home my father taught me counting on pins. He was a tailor and we had many pins of different colors at home. My father told me to put together red and blue pins or deduct green pins. Our classes at school were dull and we couldn't learn much. In the 6th form we got a new teacher of mathematic Boris Ivanovich. He was a lieutenant and a veteran of the war. He treated us like we were his equals and his mathematic classes were very interesting and we really fell in love with mathematic and with him.

Few years later I became the best in mathematic, attended mathematic clubs and took part in Olympiads in mathematic. Many years later, at the 25th anniversary of our graduation I met with Boris Ivanovich and thanked him a lot for inspiring love to mathematic in us. This helped me much in life and career. Then a teacher of physics came to work in our school. He was also a veteran of the war. Then physics began one of my favorite subjects. I attended a club of physics. I liked making detectors and other things.

Our Russian teacher was a little weird, but he loved his subject. We often teased him. The Russian language was very difficult for me. My Russian spelling was terrible. We didn't have books at home. My parents didn't go to the library and didn't buy any newspapers. When I was a senior pupil a new teacher came to teach in our class and I began to like literature. This teacher told us stories with passion. She gave us her books to read: Russian and foreign classics and Soviet authors. I liked poems most of all. We discussed books in class. I read round the clock. The power was cut off at night and I read with a kerosene lamp burning or candles. We received valenki boots, free lunches, cod-liver oil and vitamins.

There were parades on Soviet holidays. We sang patriotic revolutionary songs putting our souls into this singing. We understood that we were singing about our country, our Motherland, our leaders. We imbibed this feeling of patriotism with our mothers' milk.

I spent my summer vacations in pioneer camps. This was wonderful time. We were taken out of town near Saratov where there were wooden summer houses on the bank of the Volga. There were 6-7 groups of children in the camp, 20-25 children of the same age in each group. We went hiking played sports games, had track-and-field contents, gathered around fire in the evenings, baked potatoes and sang songs. We visited relatives and I spent a lot of time in the Glebuchevo Ravine. There were poor ramshackle houses in this wide and deep ravine stretching from the Volga to Sennoy Bazaar.

Our parents didn't 'shepherd' us and nobody counted us. We left home in the morning and they thought we were OK if we had our breakfast. Thank God, there was something to eat at all. We always played outside. In summer we played a 'tag' game, football or other games. In winter we skated. When it rained a lot in summer and Glebuchevo ravine was filled with water we went there with planks and built a crossing.

Chapayevskaya Street leading to the Glebuchevo ravine was a descent and it turned into a stream. We ran there and when somebody needed to cross the street we were at hand with our boards and arranged a crossing for them for a small fee. It was our small business: 10 kopeck each crossing. After the rainstorm we also searched for small change that someone might have lost in the street and then bought ice-cream for our savings.

Our parents rarely had vacations. Sometimes my mother went to a health center for trade union arrangements and my father stayed home with the children. Once my father took a trip to the south. We often spent summer vacations with my maternal grandfather and grandmother in the Ukraine or with my father's relatives in Tambov. When I was in the 4th form we went to visit my grandfather and grandmother in Zastavna [near Chernovtsy in Ukraine, about 1150 km from Moscow]. We went there by train and this was the first time I traveled by train. We traveled via Moscow and Kiev and I was impressed with Moscow metro.

There was no anti-Semitism at school. I didn't even know the word. Our teachers never segregated us by national origin. Even more than that, when I fought with the boy who called me 'Jew' once our teachers took time to explain to him that there were 16 republics in our country and that all citizens have equal rights.

In my childhood I rarely faced anti-Semitism. Of course, I happened to hear 'zhydovskaya morda', [abusive - 'Jewish mug'] but I always fought back. We had neighbors: the father of the family was an official from consumer cooperation and there were three daughters. One of them called me names and always provoked me for a fight. This annoyed me so much that I always ended up grabbing her by her hair. When I had my first fight I came home crying and complained to my father. He hit me hard and said 'You better take care of your situations. Don't complain to me. I shall not fight for you'. From then on I did take care of my situations. I had fights with that girl every single day. I got along well with other children. They didn't call me names and we were friends.

My childhood passed during the Stalin's times, but about arrests and the postwar anti-Semitic campaigns, struggle against rootless cosmopolites [11](#) and the doctors' plot [12](#) I only learned after the 20th Congress of the CPSU [13](#). This didn't change my attitudes toward that period of time since it was my happy and joyful childhood. I didn't care about politics at that age. I know that we were doing very well. At least, they took good care about the children that had gone through the wartime.

After finishing school in 1959 I entered the Faculty of Energy in the Polytechnic College of Saratov. After finishing this college I worked as production engineer in the electric engineering shop, then operations engineer in a design institute and then I became a designer. My Jewish identity had no impact on my studies or career, though I never kept it a secret. The only details that I kept to myself was that my sister moved to Poland in 1955 and from there she moved to Israel. I had to keep silent about it since I was working at a military plant.

When in the 1960s relationships between Russia and Israel terminated I was very concerned. My sister and nieces were there. I couldn't write them directly and we corresponded through our relatives in Vilnius. When in 1968 my sister died there were no more letters. The children were small and I just lost them. When in the late 1980s democratic changes [Perestroika] [14](#) came to Russia I began to search for my relatives in Israel immediately. I found my nieces. When a friend of mine and her husband moved there they went to see them. I received a letter and an invitation to visit and meet them. At the time when my sister was leaving her older daughter was 1 year old and her younger daughter was born in Israel and I never saw her. In 1995 my family and I went to Israel. I had never traveled abroad before. I had unforgettable impressions about this trip. I liked Israel very much. Everything breathes with history there and my roots are there.

My parents were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Saratov. My father died in 1964 and was buried according to all traditions. Two old women stayed through the night in our house to make cerement without any knots. A gabbai from the synagogue conducted the ceremony in place of rabbi. There was a minyan and a prayer was recited.

The story of my acquaintance with my husband was traditional and customary for the time. We met through matchmakers. Shadkhanim existed in all times. They worked secretly in synagogues. Some people liked to make others happy and despite all prohibitions they collected information about young people to make matches of young people. Of course, they kept these activities in secret, but all Jews knew that they could get this service for a small fee at the synagogue. Several times people from the synagogue came to offer me an acquaintance. It was a routinely matter since my mother was Jewish and she believed this was the only way to arrange marriages. She addressed this matter to the synagogue and they brought a bunch of fiancés to be whom I didn't like whatsoever.

My future husband Mark Gheller, a Jew, came to spend vacation with his brother who lived across the street from our house. At first we became friends and didn't make any plans for the future. My mother wanted me to meet a Jewish boy. At the age of 17 I was seeing a Russian boy named Slava and he proposed to me. I was very happy and ran to my mother to tell her 'Mother, I am marrying Slava!' She replied very calmly: 'First, let this Slava write his parents that his fiancée is a Jew and secondly, if you marry him and one day he call you 'zhydovskaya morda' don't you complain to me. You will have what you've chosen'.

Thought it over and then I asked Slava to write his parents in Rzhyshev. When he received a letter from there I asked him 'Well, what do they write?' He waved his hand and said 'What do we care? We are getting married, aren't we?'

It became clear to me. It meant that his parents were flatly against a Jewish daughter-in-law. And it never came to my Russian wedding.

My mother made every effort that I married Mark. Mark was in no hurry to put an end to his bachelor's life. We got married few years after we met. Mark served in the army three years and then returned to Saratov. He went to work and we continued seeing each other two more years. We registered our marriage in 1966. We didn't have a chuppah at the synagogue. We began to live with my mother.

My husband Mark Gheller was born in Baryshi village Ulyanovsk region [over 700 km from Moscow] [This village does not exist today. It might have merged with a bigger town or may have disappeared for some other reason] in 1941. His parents came from Belarus. My husband's family was not religious. They didn't observe any traditions. They didn't even know Yiddish. They were Soviet people and Party members. His father Solomon Gheller was the 2nd secretary of the regional Party committee in Verkhnedvinsk [about 450 km from Moscow].

When Germans approached Verkhnedvinsk he sent his family to the rear with one of the last transports. Germans bombed the transport. My mother-in-law Nina Gheller, pregnant with my future husband and with three other children survived. All other people perished, but she survived. She managed to get to Soviet front troops from where she evacuated to the Ulyanovsk region where she gave birth to her son Mark in November 1941. Solomon Gheller was commanding officer in a partisan unit. He heard rumors that the transport had been bombed and he decided that his family perished. He fought with Germans desperately thinking that he had nothing to lose. He was lucky, though: he didn't get a single abrasion.

Once his unit got in the encirclement. His partisans were captured by Germans. Germans did not particularly know who they were and didn't quite watch them. As a result, during their first night in captivity all partisans escaped and ran to nearby villages. Solomon Gheller found shelter in the house of a Russian woman that told authorities that he was her husband. He had false documents issued where his surname was written as Ovsiannikov. Thinking that his family had perished he began to live with this woman and they even had a son. Solomon continued to fight in the partisan unit. He became chief of shot firers. He used to spent hours lying in the snow waiting for a train. Mines did not always explode on time and their efforts were wasted. These hard conditions had an impact on his health: he got emphysema of lungs. His military documents are kept in the museum in Minsk.

After the war Solomon Gheller became director of a kolkhoz [15](#) and began to search for his family hoping that there might be survivors. They were not on the lists of deceased. He found his family in Baryshi village of Ulyanovsk region. He went to see them. Not all of them were there. His older son Boris Gheller turned 18 in 1944 and he went to the front at the very end of the war. He perished in his first combat action in 1945.

Solomon Gheller saw his younger son for the first time. He was my future husband Mark Gheller. They also had other children: Efim Gheller, born in 1928. He worked at the equipment plant in

Saratov and now he is a pensioner. His wife Anna Gorelik, daughter of a shochet and gabbai in the synagogue in Saratov, is also a pensioner now. Their children: Serafima Kats, teacher, lives in Israel, Tatiana Nosova, economist, lives in Saratov, and Clara Gheller, born in 1936. She is single and lives in Babruysk [about 500 km from Moscow] She was an accountant and is a pensioner now.

Solomon Gheller took his family to Drissa village, present-day Verkhnedvinsk, in Belarus, where he was chairman of a kolkhoz. He reunited with his family, but he also supported the woman that had rescued him and their son. His wife showed understanding of his efforts. She died at the age of 50. My father-in-law died in 1983. He was buried in Babruysk and I think he was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

I have two sons: Dmitri Gheller, an older one, was born in Saratov in 1967, and in 1974 my second son Albert was born. When my first son was born my mother insisted that we named him Naum after my deceased father, but Mark wanted to name him Dmitri. My mother went to the synagogue where she asked to register the baby as Naum, but they said the boy had to be circumcised that Mark rejected flatly. So my son didn't get a Jewish name, but his grandmother called him Naum for a long time.

My older son Dmitri learned his identity in the kindergarten at the age of 5. One day he asked me 'Mom, what is 'zhydovskaya morda?' I asked him where he had heard this and he replied 'our nanny said so'. Of course, I explained to him that he was a Jew and we were Jews and there was nothing to be ashamed of in it. On the next day I went to see the tutor of my son's group (the nanny had a day off) and said 'Margarita Sergeevna, please tell this nanny that if I hear that she calls my son 'zhydovskaya morda' ever again I won't complain to higher authorities, but I will come and literally beat her mug up like I did it in my childhood'. On the next day this nanny greeted me as if I had been her best friend. Well, she got the message, then.

My younger son Albert went to a pioneer camp when she was in the 2nd form. I went to see him once and he told me that other children called him 'Armenian' and 'Jew'. I told him that it was true that he is a Jew. He said that no, he was Russian. He was young and I told him who he was and where Jews came from.

We lived with my mother in my parents' old apartment for a long time. One year after I got married in 1968 my mother died. I already had a son and 7 years later my second son was born. Our older son slept behind a partition and our younger son slept on a folding bed. There was not enough space in our apartment for all of us.

My life was always in full swing. I read many books and periodicals and went to the theater or cinema. I tried to spend as much of my free time with children as possible. I made a rucksack for my younger son and in winter I carried him and my older son was on skis and we went to the woods on Sunday. In summer we went to the beach: my younger son in the rucksack and my older son holding me by my hand. Later I worked as a tutor in summer camps and they stayed in a camp with me a whole summer.

When I turned 45 we received a three-bedroom apartment. My older son had finished school by then and my younger son finished his 3rd form and we moved to Octiabriskiy district. My son

entered the Automobile faculty in the polytechnic College. After he finished his second year he had to go to the army. It was during the war in Afghanistan [16](#). Thank God, he didn't have to go there. He served in internal forces in Kalinin, present-day Tver [250 km from Moscow].

The younger son entered the College of Agricultural Mechanization, but then he got a transfer to its extramural department that he hasn't finished yet.

One of the most interesting events in my life was when in the late 1980s gabbai Brook decided to restore old traditions with young Jewish women, this was happening during perestroika, when religion was allowed. At first I was reluctant to get involved in this process, but then I even began to enjoy it. He asked me to make teyglakh for Purim. He even bought kosher utensils for this occasion and food products. There were few other young Jewish housewives that brought their pastries to the synagogue and it was a wonderful celebration! I was very proud to have taken part in this celebration. I attended the synagogue and studied Ivrit. Then I brought my children to the synagogue to have bar mitzvah. My younger son turned 13 and the older one was already 20, but he had a tefillin on and repeated payers after the others.

This Brook also convinced my husband Mark to have this ritual. However, they refused to have brit milah, but they identified themselves as Jews, anyway. Before Pesach all Jewish boys came to the synagogue to bake matzah. They made matzah from morning till night and occasionally they even had to stay overnight. There was a big stove in the synagogue. Mr. Brook designed a dough kneading machine and I helped him to assembly it. Only men and boys were involved in making matzah. Women were not allowed to be there. My children were not raised religious, but I went to the synagogue with them on holidays and my younger son went with me more often.

We celebrated Jewish holidays with the family and even invited our friends of different national origin. I prepared something different for each holiday. I remembered how my mother prepared celebrations and tried to follow what she did. I basically remembered a gastronomical part of the holidays. At Purim I made hamantashen and treated all children to them. However, we also celebrated Christian Easter, had Easter bread and painted eggs. I didn't go to church, of course, but I liked to make Easter bread.

Religion interested me from a scientific point of view. I know a little about all religions. I find it interesting. Since there were Tatar families in our neighborhood I learned few Tatar recipes and I also know dishes of other cuisines. We never followed kashrut in our family. I had many friends of various nationalities. I've never chosen friends for national or religious beliefs. I didn't discuss issues related to Judaism or relationships between Russia and Israel with my friends.

My sons are married. My older son Dmitri Gheller has a son named Alexandr, born in 1991. His wife Elena Gheller, nee Sorkina, is a Jew. My younger son Albert Gheller has a daughter named Alina, born in 1999. His wife Anna Gheller, nee Tsypina, is a Jew. They identify themselves as Jews, but they do not observe any Jewish traditions.

My relatives lived in various towns and I rarely met with them. My only relatives in Saratov were my uncle, my mother's brother Alexandr (Shneer) Weisman, his wife Faina Weisman and their son Zalman Weisman. We often got together.

I retired from the position of leading designer in 1997. In autumn that same year I came to work in the Hesed in Saratov. I was a volunteer at first. Now I am director of the club for the people under patronage of Hesed. We talk about Jewish traditions, celebrate Sabbath and holidays or just socialize. Basically my husband, our friends and I were the products of the Soviet rule. We never joined the party, but we believed in communist ideals dreaming that our children were going to live during communism and all difficulties were temporary and it was going to be no problem to overcome them.

We've always been patriots of our country. We've never considered emigration. How could we leave our home, the graves of our dear ones to go to the unknown. We couldn't imagine living in another country, with different way of life, different traditions and the language that we didn't know. I didn't think bad of those who were leaving, people had to think about their life themselves, but my family and I were dedicated to our country. I still think that life was good in the USSR. There was free medicine, free education, no unemployment, everybody could afford theaters, cinema, libraries, we were confident that nobody would throw us into the street or fire from work. Tell me, is there anything bad in this? Now there are so many children having nothing to do since their parents cannot afford to pay for their organized, old people are miserably poor, I didn't think democracy was like this.

The only positive thing that democracy gave me is a possibility to feel my integrity with my people. This is all thanks to Hesed. However, even before Hesed I strove to my roots. When I got an opportunity to work in the Jewish charity center I had not a single doubt that I had to do this work. And that's what I am doing. The Jewish life does not prosper in our town as yet. Most important is that the life of Jewish young people is not in its full swing. Young people are mainly concerned about earthly needs rather than spiritual. This delays development of the Jewish life. There is work to do.

- **Glossary:**

**1** Civil War (1918-1921): The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1921. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1921 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

**2** October Revolution of 1917: In early October 1917, Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party to form an immediate insurrection against the Provisional Government. The Bolshevik leaders felt it was of the utmost importance to act quickly while they had the momentum to do so. The armed workers known as Red Guards and the other revolutionary groups moved on the night of Nov. 6-7 under the orders of the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. These forces seized post and telegraph offices, electric works, railroad stations, and the state bank. Once the shot rang out from the



Battleship Aurora, the thousands of people in the Red Guard stormed the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government had officially fallen to the Bolshevik regime. Once the word came to the rest of the people that the Winter Palace had been taken, people from all over rose and filled it. V. I. Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, announced his attempt to construct the socialist order in Russia. This new government made up of Soviets, and led by the Bolsheviks. By early November, there was little doubt that the proletariats backed the Bolshevik motto: 'All power to the soviets!'

**3** White Guards: A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

**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** Cheder for girls: Model cheders were set up in Russia where girls studied reading and writing, and also had some religious instruction.

**6** 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.

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

**8** 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.

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

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

**11** Campaign against 'cosmopolitans': The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The antisemitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

**12** Doctors' Plot: The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

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

**14** 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.

**15** Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz): In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor

and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

**16** Afghanistan war: Conflict between anti-communist Muslim Afghan guerrillas and the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops. The conflict started by the coup d'état of the the marxist-leninist People's Democratic Party and the establishment of a pro-Soviet communist government. In 1979 another coup provoked an invasion by the Soviet forces and the installation of Babrak Karmal as president. The Soviet invasion sparked Afghan resistance; the guerillas received aid from the USA, China, and Saudi Arabia. Although the USSR had superior weapons, the rebels successfully eluded them. The conflict largely settled into a stalemate, with Soviet and government forces controlling the urban areas, and the guerrillas operating fairly freely in mountainous rural regions. Soviet citizens became increasingly discontented with the war, which dragged on without success but with continuing casualties. By the end of the war 15,000 Soviet soldiers were killed and 37,000 wounded. The Soviet troops pulled out in 1989 leaving the country with severe political, economic, and ecological problems.