

# Basia Gutnik

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Kiev

Ukraine

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## My family background

My name is Basia Gutnik and I was born in Kiev in 1928.

My maternal grandfather told me that he and my grandmother

came to Kiev from Rakitnoye in 1909. Perhaps they were running away from pogroms,<sup>1</sup> but I don't know for sure. Mama was 5 years old then. To obtain the right to reside in Kiev, they needed to have their child study in the grammar school. Jews were only allowed to reside in Podol<sup>2</sup> - this was their residential area<sup>3</sup>. My grandfather rented a house in Podol and my mother went to grammar school. Almost everyone who lived in that house was Jewish. Only the janitor was Russian. We also had one Russian and one Polish neighbor.

The family was poor. My grandfather was the only family member working, and my grandparents had three children to support. In addition, both my grandmother's and grandfather's mothers were also living with them. I don't remember when they died. Grandfather managed to provide for his family and pay the rent. His name was Aaron. He was born in 1880, I believe. He was an educated man. He knew Hebrew and read the Torah. He worked as a cashier in a bank. He was a very honest man. My grandmother said that whenever there was a theft of money in his office, never was suspicion cast on my grandfather. The idea that he could be a thief was simply ridiculous. His colleagues would donate money in the amount that had been stolen from him and return it to the bank.



While my grandfather was alive, the family observed the Jewish traditions. I remember my mother's brother and sister and their families visiting us at Pessach. We all assembled and my grandfather put on his thales and said a prayer. We had matzoh and wine. My mother's family celebrated many holidays, including the Sabbath, but I remember only Pessach. My grandfather tried to raise me as a Jew and told me about the Torah, but I don't remember what he said. I was too young to take any interest in such subjects. In the 1930s the practice of any religion, including the Judaism, was eliminated from our country<sup>4</sup>. And my mother's parents realized that their children might be at risk if they insisted on their religiosity. So, nobody forced us to pray or to observe any of the Jewish traditions. My grandfather died around 1936. The Jewish ritual requires that one sit on the floor for six days, and that the oldest family member read a prayer. My mother's brother, however, didn't know anything about this ritual, and so my grandmother and I went to an old man who did, and my grandmother ordered a prayer. She herself sat on the floor near the tiled stove for the six required days. My grandfather was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Lukianovka. It was closed after the war. My mother's sister Luba moved his grave to the Baikovoye cemetery where my grandmother was buried.

My maternal grandmother, Sima, was born around 1884. My grandmother had a great sense of humor. When I asked her about pogroms, she used to say "Well, the pogroms... they robbed and beat people... especially Petlura gangs<sup>5</sup>. But life went on and we had to go on with our life." I must explain here that the worst curse one can make in Podol is to call someone a "petlurovets". My grandmother could write Russian very well. As for her religiosity, while my grandfather was alive she observed all the traditions assigned by the Torah. After he died, she occasionally went to the synagogue. She had no profession. She was a housewife and looked after her husband and children devotedly. After her husband died, she dedicated all her time to her children and grandchildren.

My grandmother had three children: my mother, Luba and Matvey. Matvey was born in 1908. He was very handsome. He finished grammar school and then received further education at the Kiev Polytechnic Institute. It was difficult to gain admission into this Institute in the 1920s. Only the children of workers and peasants could be admitted. My grandfather was a clerk. The husband of my grandfather's sister was a veteran of the Great October Socialist Revolution. He and some Party official helped my grandfather to obtain a certificate stating that he had participated in the October Revolution. With this certificate, Matvey was able to study

at the Institute, and he graduated from it very successfully. He got a job assignment as a shift engineer at the KPP<sup>6</sup> and married a very nice woman named Anian. They led an ordinary life, went to the cinema and to the theater, and celebrated the Soviet holidays. When the Great Patriotic War began in 1941 ?.) and the Germans were approaching Kiev, Matvey evacuated his family, his sister, her baby and his mother. He remained in Kiev to blast boilers at the KPP. They completed their task and were going in the direction of the front when they bumped into German military. The Germans let the other workers go, but shot Matvey because he was a Jew.

Matvey had two sons. Matvey's eldest son, Rudolf, followed in his father's footsteps by studying at the Polytechnic Institute. His grandmother's name was Riva-Gisia, and Rudolf received his name in her memory: the first letter of their names is the same - such was the tradition. After the war, Rudolf worked at the heating plant in the Solomenka district of Kiev. He died of a heart attack when he was 60.

Matvey's second son, Valentin, was born fatherless. Matvey's wife, Ania, was in the last month of her pregnancy when the war began. Valentin never knew his father. While my aunt was alive we got along well.

Aunt Luba was born in 1907. She studied at grammar school and then at the Ukrainian secondary school. She couldn't enjoy her youth because of the civil war and the devastation which followed (1917 - 1921). After finishing school she entered Kiev's Pharmaceuticals Institute and then worked at the pharmaceuticals factory. She married in 1933. Her husband's name was Alexandr Morozov. He was Russian and a very decent man. He came from the Crimea and was educated at the Kiev Construction Institute, but he didn't have an apartment, so he rented an apartment from my grandmother. Before the war, he worked as a construction engineer in Kiev. In 1934 their son Mara was born. Alexandr was the first to go to war. On 22 June<sup>7</sup> the war began, and he was summoned on 24 June. Luba and all the other tenants of our house went to see him off to the recruitment office. We heard later that in a few weeks a splinter hit him on the breast, on the left side, and lodged underneath his heart. At that time doctors didn't perform surgeries on the heart and, besides, the splinter was too close to the heart to be operated on. Alexandr became an invalid. He was treated in a hospital in the Middle East and then returned to Kiev. He lived with this splinter in his breast until 1972.

At that time they didn't perform surgeries on the heart and, besides, the splinter was too close to the heart. Alexandr was

invalid of the 1st grade. He was in hospital in the Middle East and then he returned to Kiev.

In the summer of 1941 Matvey was supposed to send his family along with other KPP employees' families on a barge. He sent his wife and children, and my grandmother was supposed to go with them while Aunt Luba and her son were to wait for the next barge. But grandmother refused to go without her daughter. Later, Matvey sent Luba and Mara and my grandmother to the village of Georgievskoye, where Luba's husband picked them up and took them to Kokand where he was staying in the hospital. They all stayed in Kokand until after the war. Luba worked as a pharmacist in the pharmacy at the Zaitsev hospital. At first, her family rented an apartment in Lenin Street, then for a while moved in with us. Then, finally, Alexandr received an apartment. The address was No. 2, Andreevskiy spusk.

After his father died Luba's son changed her apartment to the one that was near his house. Aunt Luba's family did not celebrate religious holidays. Like many other Soviet citizens, they had parties or went to the cinema. Mara graduated from a Ukrainian secondary school and then studied at the Geology College. Afterwards, Mara worked for a year, but realized that his job wasn't quite what he wanted to do - he liked having comforts in life. He married a Russian girl whose parents were opposed to her marriage with a Jew. Before long, they separated. Mara was working at the Kremenchug hydropower plant where met his future wife, a Jewish girl twelve years his junior. They have two children. In 1996 they emigrated to Germany, although Mara had a good life here in Kiev. He had his own business and good business contacts in Kiev. He was known for his decent personality and expertise. I asked him why he was leaving Kiev. He said his children wanted to go. He visited Kiev in 1998.... He misses Kiev a lot.

My mother Hana Tabachnik was born in Rakitnoye in 1904. At the age of five she attended the grammar school in Kiev, but she didn't understand a wordk of Russian. (Tthere were only Russian grammar schools in Tsarist Russia, but her family only. spoke Yiddish. She had a music teacher who came to her home to teach her. My grandmother was so proud of this. Besides the music teacher, an Italian teacher also came to give her lessons in how to use her voice - she could sing well, but was too shy to sing in public. When my parents were children, they lived in the same street, and of course, they met. My mother was very pretty and my father was quite handsome. They were a beautiful couple. Both were 21 when they married in 1926. My mother told me that they had a Jewish wedding with the huppah in the bridegroom's yard. Frania, my

father's sister, said to her mother that this was the last Jewish wedding they would be having, and that her mother would not arrange anything like that for her. I've also seen once how they installed the huppah. We had a butcher in the yard and his daughter was getting married. All the village people came out to look - it was a big rarity in the 1930s. They installed a tent on four beams in the middle of the row, and the bride and bridegroom went there and prayed. Mama and Papa were also wed in this manner.

My father's parents came from Radomyshl. I don't know why they moved to Kiev. My grandmother Revekka was born in 1885 and my grandfather Iosif was born in 1882. My paternal grandparents spoke fluent Yiddish and Russian. My grandfather's name was Iosif-Alter. My paternal grandmother explained to me that when children died their parents gave a second name to the surviving child so that the next one wouldn't die. My grandparents were married in Radomyshl, Ukraine, when about their lives many times, but they wouldn't tell me anything. In Kiev my grandfather rented a room in Podol and they lived there until the end of their lives. My grandfather was a railroad forwarder in Radomyshl. He worked very hard. They married on 7 January on the Russian Orthodox Christmas, because it was an official holiday and my grandparents thought it was good to have their wedding celebration on this date. I don't know the year of their marriage, but I remember that they celebrated the 35th wedding anniversary before the war. My grandmother was moderately religious and observed some of the Jewish traditions. She was careful about having separate dishes for dairy and meat products. My grandfather, however, didn't believe in God. He just loved fried fat, and my grandmother was very concerned that nobody else should use the same frying pan, especially the children, and she always pushed this frying pan to the farthest corner of the stove. Their children grew up to be atheists.

My grandmother was a heroic woman. She was a support to her whole family. Whenever they received food during WWII, she would divide it equally among each member of the family. When there was sugar she would give everyone their share and keep none for herself. If one asked, "How about you?" she would answer, "I don't like sugar." She was a very handy cook. She could make cutlets from potato peels or flat bread from sunflower waste. Frania told me that when my grandfather lost his job he was so upset that he kept repeating in panic, "What do I do now? What do I do," but my grandmother didn't say anything - she just got some clothes together to take to the village to exchange for food, walking there with her older son. And the rest of her family just sat and waited for her. She could adjust to any circumstance. And she never knew a

life of plenty. Such was her destiny. My grandmother died in 1951. (Photo3) My aunts told me that when she lay dying, until her last moments her eyes were gazing at the portraits of her sons. My grandfather died in Charjou during the evacuation in ? 1942 and was buried there.

My grandmother had five children. Grigory, my father, was the oldest, born on 4 October 1904. He died in 1944. Debora (1907 - 1981), Fania (1909 - 1961), Maria (1911 - 1999), and Yan (1913 - 1941) followed.

The oldest daughter, Debora Gutnik, and my father were close friends as well as siblings. He often wrote her letters... when they were away from one another, even when he was at the front during the war. She studied at grammar school in Podol, and in 1931 she and Luba -- they were friends -- graduated from the Kiev Pharmaceutics Institute. They worked together for some time as shift chemists at the Lomonosov plant at Kureniovkar. Debora met her future husband, a Ukrainian named Leonid, in Kanev. She got a job assignment there as director of the sanitary and epidemiological facility. He was a high official, and when mass arrests began<sup>8</sup>, he ... ran away from Kharkov to Kanev and worked there as a turner. He was already married. Debora soon had a son. It was a scandalous situation for its time. They were living together when we arrived in Kharkov in 1941. Leonid's wife had died before that time- she had been ill. In 1942 Debora came to Maria in Minusinsk with her son, and in 1943 she moved to Kalinin - her husband had a job there with the hospital since the beginning of the war. Debora got a position as Deputy Director of the hospital pharmacy. Debora's family travelled from one town to another along with the hospital. In 1944 her daughter was born in Rzhev. They were at Daugavpils, Latvia, at the end of the war. In the spring of 1945, Debora returned to Kiev with her family. Her husband got a job as a turner at the "Geophyspribor" plant, and Debora went to work as a pharmacist at the pharmacy. My aunt loved to read Russian, Ukrainian, and foreign literature. She sang beautifully and played the piano. She had three myocardial infarctions and led a very quiet life. She rarely went to the theater, although she loved it when she was young. Her husband died in December 1958 at the age of 63. They never observed any Jewish traditions or celebrated religious holidays. Debora could understand and speak Yiddish very well, but with her family she spoke Ukrainian and Russian. Her son Vladimir was educated at the Vassilkov Pilot School as a mechanic, and her daughter Yanina graduated from the Kiev Medical School and became a lab assistant. Debora died in September 1981.



Another of my father's sisters, Frania Gutnik, who was born in 1909, must have studied at the secondary school, but I don't know for sure. After school, she took a course in typing. She was unhappy in her love life. She dated someone in the 1920s, but I know no details. They say she even had an abortion and that her lover then married a rich girl. Frania never married. She worked as a typist before the war at the Vehicle Yard in Kiev. During the evacuation she worked at a Soviet farm, excavated trenches, and was involved in the construction of fortifications. When we were in Inozemtsevo in the Caucasus, Frania went to the front with the SMERSH units<sup>9</sup>. She had an affair with a married man at the front, but terminated their relationships after the war. She didn't want to destroy his family. The war was still going on when Frania returned to Kiev and began to work as a typist at the prosecutor office. She lived with her mother and her sister Debora's family. There was a horrible famine after the war in 1946-48. There were endless lines for flour and sometimes people had to stand there for a whole day. Frania gave everything that she received through her food ration cards to her mother, sister and nephews. My grandmother used to exchange something from the package for bread. Frania suffered a lot when her mother died. But she was a very sociable person - she always had guests and parties where she and her friends danced and sang Ukrainian and Soviet songs. She was an atheist. She dedicated the rest of her life to her sisters' families. She died from a heart attack in 1961.

Maria Gutnik, my father's younger sister, finished secondary school in Kiev and met a handsome Jewish young man named Semyon Kanevskiy who came from Kiev. He worked at the mill like everybody else in his family. I don't know anything about his parents. Maria married him in 1932, right when the Podol was flooded. They didn't have a wedding party, but they sailed to the registry office on a boat. Semyon went into the army. He completed 7 years of school. He was goal-oriented and hard working, and he managed to graduate from the Political Academy in Leningrad. He took part in the Finnish and Great Patriotic War holding the position of Commissar of a regiment. After the war, he served in Brest and Kurily. They returned to Kiev in 1952 and he worked at the Otradny village as a medical tutor at the military medical school. He retired in the 1970s with the rank of Colonel. He died in 1986. Maria was a very kind person and she always tried to make everyone feel comfortable. She worked at the military hospital in Essentuki for a short time, as a supervisor of a shop in Minusinsk at the Stavropol Theater, and then was a housewife and followed her husband in his constant moving around. They didn't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate Jewish holidays. They often spoke Yiddish to one another.

They had many friends. Nationality didn't matter to them, and there were always many people in their apartment on Soviet holidays getting together to party. Maria had one daughter, Tatiana, who was born in 1946. She graduated from the Medical School in Kiev.

My father's brother Yan Gutnik (1913 - 1941) graduated from the rabfak<sup>10</sup>, or trade school,) and gained admission to the Institute of Light Industry. He was single. Yan's co-students used to get together at our home, my maternal grandfather's place. They had disputes and discussions and discussed books they had read and performances they had attended. Sometimes they worked as a troupe at the Jewish theater, in a building which is now the Brodsky synagogue. One of Yan's friends was Russian and didn't understand a word of Yiddish. Yan and a few other young Jewish men taught him a few words and he shouted them out with everybody else, though he didn't know what they meant. We were poor, but we had a rich spiritual life.

Yan went into the army in 1939, along with his co-students. Their mothers were all missing them and crying after them, but my grandmother said "Well, what are you crying about? There's no war. They will serve their term and come back!" But, unfortunately, the war began when it was time for him to demobilize. I believe he perished somewhere in the vicinity of Viasma. We received only one letter from him when during the evacuation. All our neighbors cried as they read his letter. We were told about it when we returned after the war. Yan perished in 1941, and we don't know where he was buried.

## Growing up

My father, who was born in 1904, studied at a commercial school and worked at various places. After their wedding in 1926, he and mama lived with my maternal grandparents. I was born in 1928. I was the only child in the family. I finished my first year in the Jewish school at Podol. I was almost 8 years old when I went to school, but my parents said they would take me back home if I couldn't cope there. After a year at the Jewish school, I attended the Ukrainian school which was located directly across the street from our home. My aunts and uncle and my father's parents lived within a half block of the school. So after classes I faced a dilemma about where to go. I liked to go to my aunts' place. I liked to listen to their discussions about books and performances. I went to the theater rather often. The Cinema Theater "Oktiabr," a very posh cinema, was built before the war. My friends and I went there almost every day. I finished the 7th grade right before the war. We lived in a four room apartment. My grandmother occupied one



room, my parents and I another. Mara and his mother lived in one room and the fourth room was a living room. Our family always got together for dinner. In our room we had two beds. My parents' bed was nickel-plated. There was a table in the middle of the room and a huge rubber plant beside it. After my grandfather, died I moved into my grandmother's room. The furniture included an old leather sofa, an antique cupboard, a red piano--my mother played the piano--and my grandmother's bed. There was also a very beautiful tiled stove. We liked to celebrate the New Year. In 1936 Stalin allowed Soviet citizens to have New Year trees. My paternal grandmother used to make all the decorations herself, and my maternal grandmother always admired how handy she was.

During the famine<sup>11</sup> of 1933, Papa worked at the creamery. He used to bring us butter, soap and sunflower seed husk to burn in the stove. We exchanged the soap and butter for bread and flour. Mama didn't work outside the home. She didn't have a profession. She was a homemaker and a good wife to her husband. At the age of 30 she was diagnosed by doctors as suffering from heart disease.

Papa was a very devoted son. He used to visit his parents every day. He also supported them. He gave money to my grandmother to go to Essentuki to cure her liver. Once, grandfather was in a car accident and was taken to the hospital. When the doctor asked him whether he needed crutches, he pointed to his sons and replied proudly "Here are my crutches, one son and another". He was very proud of his sons. My father and his wife lived with his wife's parents, and since her father was religious, they observed all the Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. But my father didn't do this due to religious convictions, but in order not hurt his father-in-law's feelings. He loved to read, and read fiction, scientific and philosophical literature, and discussed it with his brother and sisters. My parents and I celebrated the Soviet holidays - on the 1st of May we attended the parade and then went into the woods.

### **During the war**

When the war began my father was not subject to recruitment. He went to build fortifications in the outskirts of Kiev. When the Germans were close, he returned home. Frania was working at the vehicle storage yard. All vehicles were to be mobilized for use by the army and moved to Kharkov. Frania was allowed to take her family there. My grandmother was in poor physical condition then and refused to leave. My grandfather said that the Germans were decent people and wouldn't do them any harm. Frania said that even so, she was still going to take them away. We put my grandmother on a stretcher, loaded it onto a truck, and left: Mama, Papa and I, my

grandparents, Frania, Debora and her son.

Debora's future husband lived in Kharkov in a room in a communal apartment. We stayed with him, sleeping on the floor. There were evacuation points in all the large towns and we went there. Mama, Papa and I and my grandparents were sent to the Soviet farm "Gorky" in the Kharkov region. Debora and her son stayed in Kharkov. We lived in a big room that had a stove. We shared this room with two drivers and their families. They all went to work and I stayed with my grandmother - by that time her health was improving. The drivers, Papa and Frania went to work on the fortifications near Kharkov. Once, when they returned at night, I heard Papa telling my grandmother to start a fire in the stove so they could burn their clothes, which were full of lice, and to heat some water to wash themselves. They also said that the family had to leave Kharkov. The drivers' wives and their children returned to Kiev. The drivers went into the army. We went to Aunt Maria's - Papa's younger sister - in Essentuki. But we were not allowed to stay in Essentuki, and had to go to Inozemtsevo nearby. We rented a room and lived there for several months. In 1941 Papa got a job at a military plant. Then he said he was ashamed to be in the rear any longer. In 1942 he received a subpoena to appear at the recruitment office in Mineralniye Vody. Maria and I went to see him off. Mama and grandmother were hysterical and stayed at home. Papa perished in Poland in 1944. As for Yan, nobody heard from him for quite a while.

The four of us, Mama, my grandparents and I stayed in Inozemtsevo. One day somebody told us that there were no authorities left in the town, so we packed our backpacks and prepared to leave. We wanted to go to Aunt Maria in Essentuki. All around us there was panic and crowds. The patients from the hospital were walking past our house. The patients caught some horses and found carts. We threw our luggage onto these carts and moved on. We spent the nights in the open air and dug up vegetables from gardens to make something to eat. In this way we reached Nalchik. The situation there was panicky as well, and we were told to continue on to Ordjonikidze. When we reached Ordjonikidze the authorities there summoned whomever possible into the army. The rest of us boarded the trains heading for Middle Asia. My grandfather fell ill on the way. His legs swelled up. We reached Charjou, where we met acquaintances from Kiev. They told us to stay there. My grandfather had contracted spotted fever. He died within a month. But how were we supposed to bury him? The Uzbek people do not have the tradition of burying people in coffins. Mama went to the factory and explained that grandfather had two sons on the

front. The director of the factory felt sorry for us and gave an order to make a coffin. But the Uzbek people did not want to carry this coffin to the cemetery, so Mama and I tried to carry it ourselves, and somebody helped us along the way. Before he died, grandfather recalled his sons shouting, "The second front! The second front!" He was probably hoping that the Americans would open up a second front and defeat the fascists, so that his son would return home. We buried my grandfather and our acquaintances from Kiev even installed a monument on his grave. Mama and I went to stay with my aunt Luba and my mother's mother in Kokand. But my mother was suffering from the climate and spent most of the time in the hospital, all swollen. As soon as she got better, she and I went to stay with Papa's sisters. Mama got a job there, but I don't remember what it was. When we got to Stavropol, Mama got a job as a clerk in the hotel. My paternal grandmother went to stay with Debora in Minusinsk.

We lived in Kokand for some time and I even went to study there at the Geological College. In 1943 Mama and I went to Minusinsk. Maria and Debora were living there. Then the Germans began to retreat, and the Stavropol Theater moved back to Stavropol, and we went along with it. Vera and her family stayed in Minusinsk. Our trip to Stavropol took two weeks and we got lice. Upon arrival we found accommodation at the hostel of the Stavropol Theater. The front was nearby and Frania visited us to help us a little. She used to bring us food. In Stavropol I attended the 9th grade of the Russian secondary school. In 1943 Kiev was liberated. We ran to the evacuation point to get permission to go home, but they wouldn't give it to us. We stayed in Stavropol for another year.

In 1944 we were allowed to return to Kiev. Neither our apartment nor my grandmother's was available. Luba and her husband received an apartment in Lenin Street. There was a public toilet underneath. Luba and her husband, Mara, my grandmother, Mama, Maria and I moved in there. We had to go to court to get back my maternal grandparents' apartment. There were two Russian women and their families living there. The decision of the court was positive for our room and my Aunt's room, but we didn't get back my grandmother's apartment. When we moved back into our rooms in the apartment those women who were living there ran into the street screaming, "Help! Zhydy are throwing us out of our apartment!" and all the invalids attacked us. It was a nightmare.

## Post-war

One day after the war my two grandmothers went to the only functioning synagogue in Kiev on Yom Kippur. It was a memorable visit. The people there mourned for the deceased and those exterminated in the Babi Yar<sup>12</sup>, and people were fainting and screaming. I said, "Why did you go? What did your God give you? One of you lost one son, and the other lost two!" Grandmother Sima replied, "Well, you know, at our age we need to have faith and go to the synagogue."

Mama got a job at the "Metiz" plant in Kiev which made metal products. She was a laborer and then got promoted to the department of ready-made products. I remember she brought home defective spoons and my grandmother sold them to buy some food at the market. Later, Mama got a job as a night nurse at the kindergarten.

### **My husband Vladimir**

In 1946 I visited my aunt Maria in Brest, Belarus. My mother and grandmother stayed in Kiev. I got a job at the pharmaceuticals agency in Brest. I also took a course in English and met my future husband Vladimir Fadeev there. He was attending an evening school at the House of Officers. We were meeting at dancing parties, because the only entertainment in Brest was theater and dancing. We decided to get married.

Vladimir was Russian and was born in Kiev in 1925. He graduated from secondary school. His father Ivan --I don't remember any details of his biography-- worked at a military plant and his wife was a housewife. Vladimir had a brother named Leonid, who was born in 1939. Vladimir was like any other boy in his childhood. He went swimming in the Dnieper River, was fond of the cinema, and was not particularly fond of reading. He finished the 9th grade before the war. After the war began, all teenagers and men not subject to recruitment were taken away from Kiev. I saw them marching when we were on our way to Kharkov. The men were taken outside Kiev and told to go anywhere but Kiev. Vladimir decided to go back to look for his parents, and was captured by the Germans on the way back, along with some other boys. The Germans gave the order to take them to Bucha and shoot them. But on the way, the German guard stopped the truck and told them to get out of his sight. Vladimir ran to his home, but there was nobody there - his parents and his younger brother had been evacuated to Gorky. Vladimir got to Gorky on a flat railcar. When he arrived, he found the house where the evacuated were staying. His father was a janitor there, but he didn't recognize his son - he was dirty and lice ridden. Vladimir stayed with his parents and worked at the mine factory in Sormovo. He stayed there every night, coming rarely to Gorky. When he did

visit, he brought an additional rationed food package for his brother. When it was time for him to go into the army, the management wouldn't let him go. After the war, he gained admission into the Communications Department of Murom Military College. After graduating in 1947, he got a job assignment in Brest. He wanted to continue his studies and attended the Brest evening school at the House of Officers. The Military College curriculum was the equivalent of eight years in secondary school, and he needed ten to gain admittance to the higher military college.

When I wrote mama to tell her that I was going to get married. I didn't ask her consent. I guess she was opposed to my marrying a Russian, but later she grew to like him very much. He was very charming and kind. By the way, my Aunt Maria and her husband did not oppose my choice. Mama came on a visit to meet him. She couldn't give me any dowry. She brought me a housecoat made out of parachute silk hand-painted by one of her acquaintances. This was in 1947, and we married on 5 May 1948. We just had a civil registration ceremony and then my husband had to leave for his military unit. I went on business trip to inspect a pharmacy near his regiment and he showed me where he lived - in the barracks with soldiers. His bed was separated from the others by a curtain. Then he came to Brest. Maria and Semyon were leaving for the Kuril Islands. I lived with them, and since they were leaving, I was left with no place to live. But we were lucky and got a room next door. Our son Grigory was born in 1949.

## Our children

We enjoyed life. Although we had a baby and my husband was finishing the 10th grade, we still found time to go dancing. In 1950 Vladimir got his school certificate and was admitted to the Electrical Engineering Academy in Leningrad, so we moved there. This was during the period of the notorious "Doctors' Case<sup>13</sup>, but I only read about it in the newspapers. I felt no prejudiced attitudes by others towards me. We were close friends with some families of Vladimir's colleagues, and this friendship continues until the present. We lived in Leningrad for five years. We rented a part of a room, and shared this room with our landlady. There were six other rooms and a kitchen in this apartment. There was a long hallway, a toilet, two stoves in the kitchen and one sink - all for 22 tenants! But we got along well and my landlady used to say, "You shall have long memories of this lodging". In 1955 my husband graduated from the Academy and got a job assignment in Uzin, a town near Kiev. There were hardly any comforts, and these were outside, and there were people of all nationalities living

there. But again, we all got along well. We celebrated birthdays and Soviet holidays together, and neighbors never refused to baby-sit when we had a chance to go to the cinema or the theater. We still have few friends in Uzin. Vladimir was there from 1956 till 1965.

Our younger daughter, Ira, was born in 1957. Mama was always willing to help me and visited us in Brest, Leningrad and Uzin. She loved her grandson. She always brought him picture books as presents and read them to him. Sometimes he stayed with her. In 1957 Mama married Miron, a Ukrainian. I don't remember his last name. He worked as a loader at a store, or something similar. Later, he was put in jail for something or other and Mama had a nervous breakdown. I took Mama to the neurological department of the hospital in Uzin. In 1960 doctors diagnosed cancer. She died that same year during the surgery.

In 1965 my older son Grigory completed nine years at school and my daughter finished her first year. Vladimir got an assignment in Mozdok in Chechnya. I stayed in Uzin until the end of the academic year. Then Vladimir came to pick us up and we moved to Mozdok - he had an apartment there. Grigory finished school in this town and was admitted to the Geology College in Leningrad. After graduating, he got an assignment in Altai. There he met his future wife, a Russian girl who is also a geologist. In 1974 their daughter Elena was born. Later, his former co-students helped him to find a job in Petrozavodsk. They moved to Petrozavodsk and in 1977 their son Vladimir was born. My grandson and granddaughter are graduates of the Pedagogical Institute in Petrozavodsk. My granddaughter lives and works in St. Petersburg and my grandson lives in Israel. He finished a course of study in design. My daughter Irina graduated from a Russian school in Kiev in 1974, and then from Kiev Polytechnic Institute in 1977. She got married and her family moved to Riga in 1979. Her husband is a pilot. She works as a manager. They have two sons born in 1980 and 1986. One of them, Roman, went to Israel in 1997 to study, and stayed there. Igor studies at school in Riga. My daughter is quite content with her life in Latvia - she speaks fluent Latvian and English and finding a good job is no problem for her.

In 1975 my husband retired and we returned to Kiev. He got a position as senior engineer at the "Vulcan" plant. In 1979 the doctors found out that he had a malignant tumor, but he got well and found a job in a TV shop. We went to theater performances and visited our friends in Uzin, or they visited us. We read newspapers. We often had our four grandchildren staying with us for



quite a while. My husband always spent a lot of time with them. He died in 1998.

My children do not identify themselves as Jews. Perhaps it is so because we never celebrated Jewish holidays or observed any of the Jewish traditions. But if I did want to have it all done, I do believe that Vladimir wouldn't have had any objections. I never gave much attention to such things. It's an individual that is interesting, not his nationality. We had Russian and Ukrainian friends and there was never an issue of nationality. We spoke Russian, putting in some Yiddish words that we remembered since we were young. I feel sorry that I've almost forgotten the language. My children are very interested in everything related to Jewish culture and follow the events in Israel. They've always been open about their Jewish roots. My two grandchildren live in Israel, love it and are proud of it.

My husband never favored the idea of emigration - he cared too much about the place he lived, and I was with him in this regard. Regretfully, I've never been to Israel, but I hope to visit my grandchildren there some day and see the country of my ancestors.

## Glossary

### **1 In 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine**

They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

### **2 Podol - was always considered and is presently considered by the jewish region of Kiev**

Before the war there lived 90% Jews.

### **3 In the Tsarist Russia the Jewish population was allowed to live at certain areas**

In Kiev Jews were allowed to live in Podol, the lower and poorer part of the city.

### **4 In those years it was not safe to go to the synagogue**

Those were horrific 1930s - the period of struggle against religion. There was only 1 synagogue left of 300 existing in Kiev before the revolution of 1917. Cult structures were removed; rabbis, Orthodox

and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind the KGB (State security Committee) walls.

## **5 SIMON Petliura (1879-1926) , ukrainian politician**

Member

Ukrainian social-democratic working party; In soviet-polish war has emerged on the side of Poland; in 1920 emigrated. kill In Paris from the revenge for jewish pogroms on the Ukraine.

## **6 Kiev power plant**

## **7 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning the fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war**

On this day the  
Great patriotic War began.

## **8 In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror**

The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.

## **9 Acronym that stands for "Death to the spies"**

Security units in  
the army.

## **10 Rabfak - educational institutions for the young people that didn't have secondary education, established by the Soviet power**

## **11 Artificial famine in Ukraine in 1920 that took away millions of people**

It was arranged to suppress the protesting peasants that didn't want to join collective farms. 1930-1934 - the years of dreadful forced famine in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from farmers. People were dying in the streets, the whole villages were passing away. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that didn't want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.

**12 Babiy Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the fascists on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev**

**13 «Doctors' Case» - was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with murdering outstanding Bolsheviks**

The «Case» was started in 1952, but was never finished in March 1953 after Stalin's death.