

Minna Birman

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Natalia Rezanova

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Minna Mordkovna Birman lives with her single daughter Yekaterina in a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor of a 1956 house called 'Stalinskiy' design. A big old mirror in a carved frame catches my eye in the hallway. This mirror and two very old wardrobes are family relics. Minna received them from her parents. The rest of furniture was bought in the 1960s. There is a big round table covered with a tablecloth in the middle of the room. Minna Mordkovna is a hospitable hostess and it is next to impossible to refuse from pastries she has made particularly for this occasion. There are medications on a low table by her sofa. Regardless of her diseases 80-year-old Minna Mordkovna delights me with her young lively voice and inexhaustible jokes. She loves talking and laughs at this fondness of hers. She speaks emphatically with theatrical pauses and jests. She was enthusiastic about this opportunity to tell the story of her family of which she is very proud.



All I know about my paternal grandfather Moisey Birman is that he was born in the Jewish neighborhood in Warsaw in the 1860s. He was a melamed. He was an expert in Torah and Talmud readings and this is all he could do. The only language he spoke was Yiddish. He died in Warsaw in 1915.

I don't remember my paternal grandmother's name or date of birth. All I know is that she was a housewife and took care of the household and the children. After my grandfather died my grandmother lived with her daughter's family in Lodz. When her daughter died in 1936 my grandmother, her two granddaughters and her son-in-law moved to my grandmother's sons in Paris in 1926. During WWII, when Germans occupied Paris and announced registration of all Jews my grandmother refused to go and didn't allow her granddaughters to follow this order. Her son-in-law and one of her granddaughters went to this registration, though. They never returned home and were never seen again. My grandmother and her granddaughter Malka found shelter in their neighbor's apartment during German raids. Their neighbor was an immigrant from Italy. My grandmother corresponded with my father till the end of her life. I remember my father saying once that my grandmother had sent us an invitation to a world exhibition in Paris. She died in the late 1950s.

My father had two brothers and two sisters. I don't know much about them. His older sister, whose name I don't know, died in Lodz in 1936. My grandmother raised her two daughters. My father's

brothers Iosif and Shmil were born in Warsaw in the early 1900s. My father's younger sister Rieva was born in Warsaw in 1912. All children had education.

After the October revolution ¹ the family stayed in Poland that had separated. In 1926 Pilsudski [Editor's note: Yuzef Pilsudski (1867 – 1935), actual dictator of Poland after the military coup that he headed in May 1926. In 1926-1928, 1930 – Prime minister of Poland] came to power. Iosif had to go to the Polish army. He didn't want it and was thinking of moving to the USSR. At this time Pilsudski executed a treaty with France that needed workers and many Polish workers moved to France. Both brothers were glove makers. They were both married and decided to move to France with their families. In Paris they rented a room on the top floor of a house. Top floors were commonly accommodated by servants. They worked at home and also gave work to other Jewish immigrants. Sister Rieva worked with her brothers in Paris. She married French Jew Moris and they had a daughter named Rachel.

During WWII my father's brothers and families left Paris. Iosif and Shmil took part in the Resistance movement [Editor's note: national liberation anti-fascist movement against German occupants during WWII]. Before departure they assigned their shop to their neighbor, an Italian immigrant, since Germans took away Jewish property. During occupation this Italian man cooperated with fascists and expanded his business. After the war, when Iosif and Shmil returned to Paris, this neighbor reassigned all rights for the shop to them. Iosif's son married this Italian neighbor's daughter.

In the 1950s my father's brothers belonged to middle class and had houses on the outskirts of Paris. Iosif, Shmil and Rieva and their spouses and children came on tour to Odessa in 1961. This was the first ship with foreign tourists in Odessa. Almost all passengers were former emigrants from Russia and there was a crowd of their relatives meeting them on the seashore in Odessa. My husband and I and my mother and father came to the pier, but we had no idea whether we would recognize them. They recognized me since Rieva's daughter Rachel and I were as like as two peas in a pod. This is all I know about my father's relatives from France. After he died in 1976 I lost contact with them.

My father Mordko Birman was born in Warsaw in 1895. He was the oldest child in the family and there were numerous children born after him, which was a usual thing with every poor Jewish family. Grandfather Moisey said that there was no need for my father to go to cheder. A poor Jew had to learn his craft. My father was educated at home and the only language he spoke was Yiddish. He became an apprentice of a Jewish shoemaker. At 17 my father joined the Zionist Jewish socialist party of workers [Paolei Zion] [Editor's note: the social democratic party Paolei Zion (workers of Zion) was founded by Ber Borokhov in Poltava in 1906. In April 1917 it branched a radical socialist party Paolei Zion. The seat of its central committee was in Odessa. The social democratic party Paolei Zion adopted the doctrines of Bolshevik ideology and existed in the USSR until 1928. Soviet authorities liquidated it]. My father was a shoemaker's assistant for some time. He gave his mother his earnings and paid Party fees. He had tuberculosis since childhood. They used oxygen enrichment to cure him. As a result, my father had only one lung left. He wasn't recruited to the army due to his health condition. In 1913 my father was sent in exile to Siberia for his revolutionary activities. He was to accommodate in a village in Verholensk district of Irkutsk province [Editor's note: Verholensk district of Irkutsk region was a place for criminal and political convicts in czarist Russia (from the second quarter of the 19th century)]. My father made cone stocks in the taiga and was paid for his work. My father's younger sister Rieva told me how my

father sent them some money to them in Warsaw and they could buy potatoes and herring and she went to buy some coal from a coal seller. It was like a feast. In 1917 the term of my father's exile was over and he decided to go to Odessa to improve his health condition in the south. He was hoping to have no problem finding a job at the shoe factory in Odessa. During his trip back my father felt ill. He started hemoptysis and arriving in Odessa my father had to sit at the railway station all exhausted. This was where my father met my future mother.

My maternal grandfather Mordko Gredenitski was born in Gradanitsy village Ovidiopol district Odessa region in the 1860s. In the 1880s he moved to Odessa and got married. Grandfather Mordko was a small stockjobber dealing in wheat. He wasn't doing very well. I heard in my childhood grandfather calling his family 'kaptans' ['beggars' in Yiddish]. I visited my grandmother and grandfather when they lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the same house where we lived. They had beautiful furniture. My parents told me that in 1912 my grandfather made good money and bought new furniture. I have a mirror in the carved frame and a wardrobe from this set of furniture in my apartment. When I visited my grandparents I opened the wardrobe to pick pieces of matzah wrapped in a tablecloth. I remember that grandfather Mordko was a handsome old man with a gray beard. He wore casual clothes common with townfolk. He was religious. He attended a synagogue and spoke Yiddish at home. My grandfather died in a hospital in Slobodka [Neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa.] in 1927. He was buried in the 3rd Jewish cemetery in Slobodka.

My grandfather Mordko had two sisters. I know little about them. They lived in Tiraspol (in Moldavia presently) where they got married. After the NEP [2](#), was over their husbands lost their business and they all moved to their relatives in Odessa. His younger sister lived with our family for some time. I remember that she was called 'bobele' ['grandmother in Yiddish]. She didn't have children. Bobele died shortly before the war. The second sister, whose name I don't remember, left Odessa after her husband left her. This is all I know about their life.

My maternal grandmother Ghitl Gredenitskaya (nee Kerzhner) was born in Akkerman [Belgorod-Dnestrovski since 1918] in the 1850s. When living in Odessa she was a housewife. Grandmother Ghitl also cooked for our family. At Pesach she made dishes from matzah. Grandmother Ghitl was very religious. She went to the synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street, but she did it in secret to not spoil the reputation of my parents who were Party members. She wore dark modest dresses and a kerchief tying it over her ears. The only language grandmother Ghitl talked was Yiddish. She spoke poor Russian. Ghitl had brother Yakov and sister Sopha. I don't think I know anything about them. Ghitl died in 1930. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery

My mother Sophia Gredenitskaya was the only daughter in her family. She was born in Odessa in 1893. At that time my grandfather had a three-bedroom apartment. My grandfather let one room to a Jewish teacher who was only allowed to teach Jews. This teacher helped my mother to prepare to study in a grammar school. My mother went to the 7th grade in a grammar school in order to save money and receive a certificate as soon as possible. After finishing the 8th grade in grammar school students were allowed to teach. My mother wanted to continue her studies, but her family couldn't afford it. During WWI all relatives of veterans of the war were issued a permit for free education. One of my mother uncle Yakov's sons was at the front during the war. He sent my mother confirmation that he was at the front and my mother managed to enter the medical Faculty of Novorossiysk University in 1915. In 1917 a revolution began. My mother got involved in

revolutionary activities and quit the university. Her fellow students were involved in revolutionary activities and they involved my mother. My mother's friends were Jews from Foreign collegium [Editor's note: collegium of foreign propaganda in Odessa regional committee of the Communist party of Bolsheviks (December 1918 - August 1919) - an underground Party group formed at the decision of the central committee of the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks to conduct revolutionary propaganda in interventionist troops in the south of Ukraine during the Civil war. This group was shot by Denikin troops in 1919]. Its member was Jacques Yelin [Editor's note: Yakov (Jacques) Yelin (1888 - 1919), one of organizers of the foreign collegium. Shot by French interventionists in 1919], Shtivelman among them and she knew many other members. These young people couldn't enter a university in Russia due to the quota. They went to study in France, came to Russia on vacation and when the Civil War [3](#) began they couldn't go back to France.

My mother also had ties with the Zionist socialist working party. Once in 1917 she heard somebody saying 'A comrade has returned from exile. He has hemoptysis and is staying at the railway station'. My mother and her friend Manya Gombakh went to the railway station to pick up a former convict. Manya was an orphan. She lived with her brother and there was no space for anybody else in their dwelling. My mother took my future father to her home. Grandfather Mordko and grandmother Ghitl didn't mind. They helped my mother to look after my father. The young people fell in love with each other and began to live in a civil marriage. They also belonged to the same party. At that time left procommunist wings separated from bourgeois Jewish socialist parties and united into a Jewish communist union that supported Bolsheviks. My father was a member of the committee of the union and my mother was his messenger. When Denikin troops [4](#) came my parents went into the underground with Bolsheviks. In 1920 when the Soviet regime won over they officially joined the party of Bolsheviks. My father was sent to the Romanian border. During the famine of 1921 [5](#) many people tried to leave Russia for Romania and there were many arrests. My father had unlimited authority. He could even cancel arrests of ChK [6](#). Later he started hemoptysis and had to return to Odessa.

My grandmother and grandfather wanted my parents to have a religious wedding and convinced my parents to enter into one. My mother and father went to the synagogue. There was a chuppah at their wedding. However, I've never seen any document from the rabbi's office. When in 1921 my father was a member of the regional committee of the Communist Party there was a Party purge. My mother was trying to tell my father to keep the fact of their wedding at the synagogue since she had already been through it and told them everything. However, my father didn't understand such things. He wrote the truth in his report and was expelled. He lost his position, but he had ties with Jewish organizations. They valued him and during the famine in 1922 my father was appointed a Joint representative in Yelisavetgrad of Odessa province. My mother went with him. She was manager of a women's department. My parents were paid in golden 10-ruble coins. They sent some money to my father's mother in Poland.

They stayed there through 1922 and 1923. I was born in Yelisavetgrad [Kirovograd from 1924] on 2 January 1923.

In early 1924 my father came to Odessa. The period of famine was over and Joint ended its activities in the USSR. My father was appointed chairman of the party committee at the shoe factory. Holding this position he took over the Brodskiy synagogue [Editor's note: one of the biggest and most beautiful synagogues in Odessa. Its origin goes back to the arrival of Jewish

migrants from Germany and Halitsia in the early 1820s in Odessa. They were called 'Brodskiy' Jews after the name of Brody town. The synagogue was open in 1940. This was the first choral synagogue in Russia. Construction of the building of the synagogue started in 1863 under supervision of architect F.Kolovich. It was funded by contributions. Since 1925 the Brodskiy synagogue housed Odessa regional archive] to make a factory club in it. Once I asked my father 'Why did it have to be the Brodskiy synagogue?' and he replied 'It was the most beautiful one and I wanted poor Jews who had lived in basements and had never had an opportunity to go to this synagogue to come to this beautiful club and feel human there'. He frankly believed it was a noble deed on his part.

On 19 February 1927 my brother Ilia was born in Odessa. We lived in 12, Lenin Street then. My mother was ill after childbirth and the baby screamed all the time. I remember coming to his bed and dumping all my toys into his bed: it was a doll crockery tin set. My parents talked me off since I scratched the baby. Ilia's birth was a trauma for me. I believed he was loved more. At the age of 3 I went to the kindergarten of leather craftsmen in 25, Yekaterininskaya Street. The kindergarten was one block away from where we lived. I remember my father teaching me to be on my own. He didn't hold me by my hand, but walked fast ahead of me. I followed him gazing at his gray head. There was a noise orchestra in our kindergarten. We played triangles, castanets and tambourines. In summer the kindergarten went to a dacha. We lay in the sun, bathed in the sea, played and had meals outside. My mother always shaved my head to avoid the risk of fleas.

In 1930 -my mother was sent to study in Odessa College of Tinned Food (present Refrigeration Industry College). This same year I went to school. People's commissar [minister] of education issued an order to switch to the Ukrainian language of teaching at schools. There was one Russian school left in each district of Odessa. For some reason my parents sent me to Ukrainian school #4 on the corner of Troitskaya and Preobrazhenskaya Streets. I was a miserable pupil since I didn't know Ukrainian. My Ukrainian teacher used to say 'Is this a girl? This is a boy and isn't he a bad one!' considering my short haircut and bad marks. Once my teacher told me to tell my mother to come to school for a talk. My mother was so busy that I decided to tell her nothing. Instead, I stopped going to school. I left home in the morning and went to walk along Alexandrovski Prospect where I played with cobbles. Then I went to Troitskaya Street and waited until schoolchildren began to leave school and I went home. This lasted for a month and a half.

My friends from our yard Vitia Degtiar, Volodia Chudinov, Nadia Shyriaeva, Volodia Shtubes, Boria Sovietov studied in Russian school #25, in Bariatinski Lane (present Nakhimov Lane). My friend Nadia Shyriaeva tried to pull strings for my transfer to her school. Her teacher Maria Isaakovna said it was not possible. The port was sponsoring his Russian school and children had their school parties in the port club. Nadia invited me once to a party. The entrance to this club was on the first floor from Lastochkin descend and exit from the concert hall was from the second floor down a very narrow staircase. When we were going in somebody yelled 'Fire!' and everybody ran to the exit door. Only noticed the beginning of panic and when I came back to my senses I saw Nadia standing over me crying and Maria Isaakovna standing beside her. When Maria Isaakovna saw me opening my eyes she sighed with relief 'Hey, she is alive!' I had a hemorrhage in my eye. After this happened Maria Isaakovna felt sorry for me and convinced my mother to send me to school #25.

The famine in 1933 didn't have an impact on our family. We even had extra food. My father was director of mixed fodder plant and received good food rations there. Besides, he was a member of

the association of former political convicts [Editor's note: for some reason (1921 -1935) was founded in Moscow and had over 50 affiliates in various towns of the USSR. It published the 'Katorga and ssylka' and 'Bulletin' magazines] and all members received food at the regional Party committee food department. My mother was in the Tinned Food College that had ties with tinned food factories. She also received food packages and lunches. My parents also had additional food cards as members of the party. I know that my parents gave their extra cards and food to their relatives. I also remember that there were many homeless children at this period. There were asphalt containers in the streets. They were for melting asphalt and kept warm for a long time. At night those children slept in them. Once my friend and I went to a confectionery store in 12, Deribassovskaya Street. It was in the basement and there were bars on its windows. There were homeless boys sticking to these bars. One boy untied his clift, a quilted cotton wool coat, and we saw that he was absolutely naked underneath. What happened was that they were taken to a children's room in the railway station. They took their clothes for sanitary treatment and then it turned out there was no place to accommodate the children. All children's homes were overcrowded. They gave them these quilted coats and let them go. My friend and I grabbed the boy and brought him to my home. My parents decided that my father would try to pull strings for the boy to go to a children's home, but then my mother said: 'Let him stay and this means that we will have three children'. The boy stayed with us for some time. My parents gave him good clothes, but once he told our housemaid Fenia that he was going to look for his brother. He left and disappeared.

We had a two-bedroom apartment. The bigger room had an area of 30 square meters. My mother liked everything in the apartment to be nice. She bought a beautiful silk shawl and ordered a lampshade to be made from it. There were curtains on the windows and there were woolen strip carpets on the floors. There was a beautiful mirror in a carved frame over the sofa and a big Ukrainian woolen carpet in red roses on it. There was a big table in the center of the room. My mother didn't do any housework. She couldn't cook. Our housemaid did the cooking and served meals to us. Our first housemaid Emma was German. She came from a family of dispossessed German colonists [7](#). Then we had housemaid Fenia. She was also German. Our neighbors used to say to my mother: 'You pay your housemaid everything you earn'. My mother replied that she preferred to go to work and feel an active member of the community. We didn't often have guests, but they came to us after a parade on 1 May and 7 November [October revolution Day] [8](#). The table was covered with two white tablecloths. After a meal the guests sang revolutionary songs and danced. My father danced very well. He was an artistic, easy-going and very sociable person. He was very thin due to his disease. My mother was a tall grand lady. She liked to dress nicely and never had enough money left for food. My mother wore crepe de Chine dresses and hats. My mother's dressmaker made clothes for her and for me. Every year I had a fancy dress made for me. After wearing it for a year I began to wear it to school and had a new fancy dress made for me. I remember going with my mother to a hat shop to order a new hat for her. This was the only time she took me there and I was so happy that I felt like floating beside her. My mother chose a pink felt hat with silk bands. My mother was so beautiful! She always had her hair done and her nails manicured. Once her colleagues commented that a member of the Party wasn't supposed to have manicured nails and my mother replied with defiance: 'Would you feel better if I had black nails>' -You will be expelled from the Party!' - You just try!' My mother was never afraid. She had this kind of character.

My mother and father were so different: she was noisy and had a loud voice, she could even slap us if she was in this kind of mood. My father was quiet her opposite: he never raised his voice and spoke quietly and was against physical punishment of the children. My parents were very kind and sympathetic people. My parents hardly spent time with us. My mother was at work until late. She worked in the trade department of the town Party committee and didn't have time for her children. I came from school and my brother came from his kindergarten and we played in the yard until my father came home from work. My mother came home at six o'clock. By this time we had to be at home and have our hands washed. The family got together for dinner and our housemaid was at the table with us. After dinner my mother went back to work and stayed there until nine o'clock. My father often left home in the evening. He spent time at the association of political convicts and was involved in social activities.

In the early 1930s my father and other communists were sent to a district town to organize collectivization [9](#). My father was reluctant to be involved in this and didn't accept any forced measures toward farmers. This became known and my father was called back for a discussion in the town Party committee. At this time he had hemoptysis again and my mother didn't allow him to go there. She sent my father to a tuberculosis recreation center in Gagry. When he returned home this incident was forgotten.

We had portraits of Marx [10](#), Engels [11](#) at home and a photograph of Lenin [12](#) on the table, but we never had any portraits of Stalin. My mother called him 'a man with moustache'. In 1934, when Kirov [13](#) was murdered my parents had a hot discussion about how this could happen and where his guards were at the time. They thought it was different from what an official version described.

In 1936 Ushrovich, director of Odessa Torgsin [14](#) stood in public court. The charges against him stated that he was a provoker since the time when he was in exile in Siberia. Ushrovich managed to prove that all these charges were false. Beginning from middle 1937 [Great Terror] [15](#) many of my classmates' relatives were arrested. There were children of 12 nationalities in my class. Galia Panaioti, a Greek girl, had her mother and father arrested in 1936. Luba Turchenko, a Ukrainian girl, her mother was arrested. Her mother was chief of political department of Chernomorsk shipyard. Ania Gavrilchenko, Ukrainian – her uncle was arrested. Galka Dyomina, Russian, her father was arrested. Our Ukrainian teacher Polikarp Lvovich disappeared. Later he returned and continued teaching. He never mentioned what happened to him. My friend Rogovaya's father worked in railroad shops and was a Party organizer of the association of political convicts. He was arrested in 1936 and he disappeared.

My parents discussed the subject of arrests in 1937 whispering at night. Their loud whisper woke me up sometimes and I heard their conversations unintentionally, but I didn't tell anybody. My mother was strict about the family order: the children were not allowed to talk about any talks or happenings at home. I remember my mother once punishing my brother with a belt for blurting something out in the yard that my father was grabbing her hands screaming 'Sophia, you will kill him!' My parents sorted out their collection of books. There were political books that my father collected and they had to get rid of them. There were works by Trotskiy [16](#), Kamenev [17](#). They threw them out.

My father was arrested in 1938. He was accused of wishing to assist Hitler and Japan to attack the Soviet Union. What else could they accuse him of? Shortly before arrest our janitor Gidulian told

my father that he knew very well who was the next to be arrested. Before arresting a person NKVD [18](#) officers visit a janitor under pretense that they intend to check a housing roster, but actually they ask questions about the tenant that interests them. The janitor said that they've come to see him and asked about our neighbor Rhubel, director of a recreation center in Kholodnaya Balka town, but this Rhubel was away from home. The janitor respected my father and advised him to leave home as well, but my father ignored it: 'Where can I go? We don't have money to travel!' By that time he was fired from work. However, we moved to the dacha where he was arrested on 8 June 1938. Young NKVD officers came to arrest him. My mother and father slept on the terrace and my brother and I slept in the room. They made a careless search and my mother managed to put some Party documents into my pocket. They didn't search us and we kept these documents.

Somebody named Melnichenko had something to do with my father's arrest. I remember this name very well even now. He probably wanted to have a big Jewish trial in Odessa and all arrested Jews were kept in the town. This saved many Jews, including my father. My mother wrote a letter to Stalin. She told my brother and me that Stalin's office would send this letter back to Odessa and my father would stay in town until they clarified all circumstances. My father stayed in prison for about two years and returned home. He was very lucky to have been arrested on 8 June 1938 and Yezhov [Editor's note: N.I. Yezhov (1895-1940) – people's commissar of home affairs in the USSR in 1936-1937] had been replaced with Beriya [19](#). During the Yezhov rule prisoners were beaten and put on conveyor like they did in the past. Beriya issued an order to stop beating and tortures. When my father was arrested the housing authorities gave one room to a woman whose husband was also arrested. My mother didn't get along with her. They argued and my mother called her a whore. When my father was released she sued this woman to have her out of our apartment and the court took a decision for this woman to move out. Then all of a sudden my mother declared that however bad this neighbor might be she was the wife of a prisoner and we couldn't throw her out. This woman stayed to live with us.

After my father was arrested I left school and entered a Jewish Machine building Technical School. My mother felt positive about it. She was afraid of being arrested and hoped that they wouldn't send my brother to a children's home now that I was a student. I received a stipend at school and I could learn a profession soon. Prisoners' children were thrown out of educational institutions, but when filling up my application form in the line item 'father' I wrote 'my father doesn't live with us at present'. I didn't lie, but I didn't tell the truth either. Later it became known that director of my school knew that my father was in prison, but she kept silent about it. I studied at school for three years. I didn't join Komsomol [20](#), since I didn't want to join an organization of executioners. I thought: Komsomol and Party members were involved in beating my father and I couldn't be in the same organization with them. My mother argued with me. She thought this was dangerous conduct, but I stood my point.

Through this whole period my classmate Revmir Cherniak gave me moral support. He was my future husband. He often came to my home and helped me with everything. Revmir was born in Odessa in 1923. His parents Isaac and Torah Cherniak came from Lithuania. They were also involved in the revolutionary movement. His father was sent in exile in Arkhangelsk region before 1905 and his wife followed him there. Later they moved to Odessa. They were tailors. Revmir had two brothers: Israel and Mikhail and sister Mariana Aihenvald in her marriage. They were much older than Revmir. Mikhail, their youngest, was born in 1910. Revmir finished school in 1940 and

entered a military school in Leningrad. I corresponded with him.

On 21 June 1941 [Great Patriotic War] [21](#) I went to the dacha to visit my father's friend from Kharkov Shura Poplavskaya. The weather was bad on the next day that was Sunday. It was raining. All of a sudden we heard Levitan's [22](#) voice on the radio at 12 o'clock: 'All radio stations of the Soviet Union speaking'. He announced that fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Everybody knew that there was going to be a war, though. Shura said that we had to buy tickets to Kharkov. Shura and I went to the railway station. It was awful there with crowds of people trying to buy tickets. Shura managed to buy a ticket and went to Kharkov. On the first day Levitan announced that Odessa and Sevastopol were bombed. I didn't see any bombing in Odessa on that day. The first serious bombing was on 22 July. German planes were combing streets on a low level flight. I was going along Grecheskaya Street to my friend when I heard explosions and jumped into an entrance of a house. There were trams #23 moving along Grecheskaya Street. Streetcars rushed up and down the street at full speed so that sparks were falling from wires. Passers by told each other that many young men and women perished in Primorski Boulevard. I ran home to make sure that my family was all right. On my way home I saw Pushkin's house [A.S. Pushkin museum] on fire. There was nobody home. My parents were at work.

My father was again director of mixed fodder plant and my mother worked in the trade department of the Party town committee. She said that members of the Party were not allowed to evacuate, but they received evacuation cards for members of their families. She obtained cards for us and her cousin sister Vitia who was her close friend as well. I said we were not leaving without her. Our neighbor Lisa Aleventshtein didn't want to evacuate for a different reason. She said: 'Where would I go? I have no husband and I have three small children and my old mother. I have no money'. She was very concerned about expensiveness of life. There were rumors in Odessa that evacuation was very expensive, that a bagel cost 5 rubles. We were going to leave Odessa in the direction of Nikolaev along with army troops. Once during another air raid I was hiding in an entrance with a woman. She asked me why we were not leaving and I replied that we were planning to leave with army troops. She said: 'I am from Pereyaslav [present Pereyaslav-Khmelnitskiy]. The army left it. They don't even take officers' wives with them! This is not even a Civil War, you know!' I felt scared. When I came home I told my mother that we had to leave immediately. My mother made jute sacks for each of us to be able to walk with our luggage. My father couldn't leave the town due to his orders. While we were waiting for him we found out that Germans had come to Nikolaev and Odessa was in encirclement and there was the only way out by sea. My mother's acquaintance from the Party town committee gave us boat boarding tickets to Novorossiysk [700 km to Odessa by sea].

My mother's cousin sister Vitia Vishnevskaya said when my mother brought her a ticket: 'My daughter-in-law (she was Russian) is not allowed to quit her job and I cannot leave her with a baby and go!' Aunt Vitia and her younger son Yakov stayed in Odessa. Once, when they were out, her bitch of a daughter-in-law took their gold from a hiding place in their apartment and aunt Vitia's good coat and left for Nikolaev with her baby. Aunt Vitia stayed in Odessa during occupation [23](#). Aunt Vitia didn't even have a coat to go to the ghetto. Her neighbor gave her a coat. Her daughter-in-law came to their apartment in 1942 during occupation and took away all their furniture. Their neighbors told her off and she threatened them: 'If you talk much I will go to the town office and report that you help Jews!' At this time other people were rescuing aunt Vitia's son Lazar

Vishnevski. He was captured and when Germans ordered: 'Communists and Jews make a step ahead' Lazar was standing in the second line and wanted to step forward, but the men standing in front of him didn't let him. Lazar asked him to move aside, but he replied: 'Go to hell!' 'I am a Jew!' 'What the hell, you are Vishnevski, a Polish!' «Russians saved his life another time as well. Prisoners were to go to a bathroom. Lazar said to his fellow prisoner: 'What do I do now? I am circumcised!' He gathered few reliable men and they shielded Lazar so that a guard didn't see him. They saved his life.

Two Russian women living in our house Berezovskaya and Rogova cooked cereals every day, took buckets of water that they carried on a yoke and went to the ghetto in Slobodka. They brought food for the family of Lisa Alevshtein and our neighbor Rhubel. Rhubel's two sons were at the front. Before going to the ghetto she left two suits with Berezovskaya in case her sons returned from the army and had nothing to wear. The Alevshtein family and Rhubel perished. They were probably shot near our house where there is the Park of Lenin. There used to be a ravine and now there is a pond in this spot.

From Novorossiysk we were taken to Ust-Labinsk of Krasnodar region. We didn't have any money and my mother went to a district Party committee looking for a job. Secretary of the district committee said: 'Why do you want to get a job here? Germans are advancing. They are almost near Rostov. Move farther to the east of the country!' My mother said we didn't have money. The secretary arranged a free train trip to Kropotkin town and gave us a note addressed to commandant of Kropotkin requesting assistance for us. Nevertheless, we stayed in Ust-Labinsk for about two weeks. We worked in a kolkhoz: my brother mowed grass and I worked in a vegetable crew. Chairman of the kolkhoz gave us some flour: this was our earning, he said. The owner of the house where we stayed, a Kazak woman, baked us some bread and gave us some cheese. She said: 'I don't know what is going to happen to us. What if we have to escape and then somebody will help us?'

I faced anti-Semitism for the first time in my life during this trip. I was sitting on a platform at the railway station in Kropotkino when a train from Caucasus arrived. Some recruits came onto the platform. They asked me: 'What's the news?' I began to tell them about the situation when one of them asked all of a sudden: 'What's your nationality?' I said: 'I am a Jew' and he said: 'Can't you hear that she burrs her 'r'? I felt like doused with boiling water. Nobody ever said anything like that to me. At that moment a young man, a Russian blond with blue eyes, came up to me and said: 'Don't listen to this idiot. He cannot talk himself. Don't be afraid. We shall beat Germans and you will go back home. All the best to you!' and he shook my hand. I shall never forget this.

We finally arrived in Tashkent [3.200 km from Odessa in Uzbekistan] We immediately obtained a residential permit and received a 14-square-meter room at reasonable cost. Later we exchanged this room for another room in a private sector. Here we also paid reasonable fees for the room and power. My parents were treated well. My father worked as a controller of water gauge facilities. He inspected water jets. My mother worked as an accountant. I don't know in what organization she worked. My brother Ilia went to a vocational school where he received a uniform and was provided meals. I went to work at the Tashkent agricultural machine building plant that manufactured shells and repaired tanks at that period. There were vacancies in a foundry and I went to work there. I was a core rod installer installing core rods into shells. We worked 12 hours per day. There were Uzbek workers as well. They didn't speak Russian and didn't understand anything. They were

constantly scolded. They had to carry such heavy loads that we felt sorry for them, even though our life was as rough. Thus, I heard some Uzbek talking about 'zhydy' [abusive word for a Jew] behind my back on a bus. I turned to them and said that in that case they were 'sarty', abusive for Uzbek people. They were about to beat me.

In Tashkent we received 800 grams bread per day per our bread coupons and workers of the foundry received a free lunch and additional 200 grams of bread. It was a miserable lunch with flour prevailing in dishes. There was a spontaneous market near the entrance to the plant where workers were selling their ration of bread. 800 grams was the weight of a loaf of bread. I went to the market once and found out that selling one loaf I could buy enough food for my whole family. I sold a loaf every other day buying rice and even plant oil. Uzbeks delivered milk to houses. They sold it on credit. We were surprised, but our landlady explained that there were no local customers to buy it anyways and all they wanted was selling it one way or another. I also donated blood and received additional food for it. Some time later my father went to work at the Tashkent town executive committee, but their ration of food was small and my father was swollen from hunger. My mother and I had pellagra [Editor's note: disease caused by lack of nicotinic acid and some other vitamins of B group]. My parents and I wore our winter coats that my mother had packed into our sacks back in Odessa. My brother also received a quilted coat and boots in his vocational school. There were very cold days in Tashkent. Once my brother caught cold. He felt ill, but he went to school for a meal. They even had meat for lunch. He was told that he could take his food home. His ration of food was enough for three of us.

My brother Ilia studied at school for a year and became a car mechanic. He and other graduates were sent to work in the Ural. There doctors discovered that my brother had tuberculosis and sent my brother back to Tashkent. On the way to Tashkent he was robbed somewhere in Kazakhstan. He went to commandant of a town and since he looked older than he actually was this commandant sent him to a medical check up and from there my brother was sent to a march company. Since he was educated they made him a clerk. He stayed in Kazakhstan for four months. Then he returned to Tashkent. Ilia was eager to go to the front. He continuously went to a military registry office requesting them to send him to the frontline. Chief of the registry office got so tired of him that he burned Ilia's passport, wrote that his year of birth was 1926 and sent him to the army in 1944. Ilia studied in a sniper school in Kushka. Then he studied in Volskoye technical school and after finishing it in 1945 he was sent to an aviation regiment that moved to Austria. Ilia was a technician in a squadron. At the end of the war he was in Austria. After the war Ilia served in the army for 7 years. He finished his service in Grozny where he married a local woman. Her name was Taya Shubina. He moved to Odessa with his wife. We made Ilia finish the 10th grade. His wife didn't want to live in Odessa and they moved to Grozny. Ilia finished the Oil College. His wife worked as a seamstress. In 1956 their son Igor was born.

My parents and I returned to Odessa in 1944. There were other tenants in our apartment. We went to court. We felt anti-Semitic attitude toward us. Since my mother and father were members of the party since 1919 and they wrote a complaint to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine they managed to obtain a residential permit for us to live in Odessa. They returned one room to us. The judge said: 'This is sufficient for three people'. My brother was at the front. I didn't work at first. I donated blood and received a food package and a meal for it. My mother began to work in the city finance department and father soon got a job of inspector in savings-bank.

My fiancé Revmir was at the front near Moscow in 1941. He was wounded and was taken to hospital with his legs frost-bitten. Gangrene started on one foot. It was amputated and he was sent to a hospital in Kazan. After he was released he was sent to Podolsk infantry school where he taught artillery. He continuously requested to send him to the front and he finally succeeded. In 1943 he took part in Kursk battle [24](#), and then in Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy operation [Editor's note: 24.1 – 17.2 1944, in the course of struggle for Pravoberezhnaya Ukraine Soviet armies of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts П (army generals N. F. Vatutin and I.S. Konev) encircled over 10 armies of the South group German armies (General Field Marshal Manstein) and crushed them], he was awarded an order, he also took part in battles near Yassy and was awarded another order. He sent me his officer's certificate for allowances. Revmir was in Banska-Bistrica in Czechoslovakia when the war was over. He arrived in Odessa in autumn 1945. We became a husband and wife, but we didn't register our marriage.

In 1946 our daughter Yekaterina was born. Only then we registered our marriage to obtain a card for the baby. It was a card for 400 grams of bread. My husband entered the Mechanic Faculty of Odessa Polytechnic College. I entered Communications College and received a stipend. In 1951 our son Mikhail was born. We didn't doubt that my husband would get a job assignment [25](#) in Odessa after finishing his college since he was an invalid of war and had two children. : However, he was the only one of all graduates to be sent to Petropavlovsk [in Kazakhstan] in the north. Of course, this had to do with my husband's nationality. It took us quite an effort to have them change my husband's job assignment. We moved to Kaspiysk [in Russia now]. I commuted 20 km to work in Makhachkala. I worked as senior technician of international telephone communications. I continued my studies as extramural student in Odessa Communications College.

In 1953 in Kaspiysk we got to know about Stalin's death. The only thought I had had about Stalin was "Let him die!" I lived with a constant oppressive feeling as if the sky was on my head. When Stalin died I felt as if this sky lifted up. I felt so happy! However, my husband cried. He easily subdued to influences. When he joined the Party I asked him how he could do it and he replied: 'My commissar was so good and we were friends!' 'But you laughed at him saying that a political officer was nobody!'

In Kaspiysk our daughter Yekaterina went to school in 1953. I went to take my exams in Odessa. I had all excellent marks, but they didn't give me a diploma. I had to complete practical training and I failed to find a job of telephone operator in Odessa. So I never got my diploma. My husband completed his mandatory term in Kaspiysk and we returned to Odessa in 1955. We lived with my parents. An acquaintance of mine helped me to get a job of assistant accountant in the jute factory storeroom. In 1956 it was decided to remove our house in Lenin Street. We received a billet for a two-bedroom apartment for six of us. My husband was on the list for receiving an apartment as an invalid of war and I thought we had to fight for receiving two apartments, but my father, my mother and my husband were telling me that we had to agree. Their major argument was 'There is a bathroom in the apartment!' I tried to tell where I was going to have my children sleeping – in the bathroom?', but they didn't hear my point. Since then we've lived in those two rooms in Gamarnik Street.

Our family had a difficult life, but we were seeing changes to better during Khrushchev rule [26](#). Khrushchev was a good person. He gave apartments to people living in basements and earth-houses. It was impossible to make a living on pensions before Khrushchev, but he made pensions to

enable people to live on them. However, the state level anti-Semitism became stronger during Khrushchev rule. My husband and I did face it. He left his job and it took him a month of searching before he managed to get another job. Nobody was employing him! The human resource manager of one Odessa plant, who formerly worked in a labor camp employed him and his director asked him 'How come you you've employed a Jew?' and he replied 'I had a vacancy of an engineer and he is an experienced engineer! I didn't look at his passport, I don't care about his nationality! There were Jews and Ukrainians in my camp and they were all equal!' Later somebody told my husband this story. Our daughter and son also faced negative attitudes at school, particularly our daughter since she happened to be the only Jewish pupil in her class.

In the late 1950s my brother Ilia, his wife and their son moved to Odessa from Grozny. They came to live with us. There were 9 of us living in two rooms. It was awfully hard. Ilia's wife Taya turned out to be greedy. She used to nag to her husband for a whole week that he dared to spend three rubles without her permission. My mother offered them money for them to rent a room, but Taya didn't want it. She felt as a hostess in our apartment. After another row I opened the door and said: 'Get the hell out of here or I will throw you out with all your belongings!' They left. My parents gave them money to buy a one-bedroom cooperative apartment that they bought in Filatov Street. Ilia fell under his wife's influence and became as greedy as she was.

In 1961 my mother died. She was buried in the 2nd Christian cemetery. My daughter Yekaterina finished school in 1964. She tried to enter the Chemical Faculty of Odessa University four times and only the fifth time she was successful. She is sure that these failures at the exams were not incidental. Yekaterina managed to enter an evening department. She never got married.

In 1965 my father traveled to Paris at the invitation of his brothers Iosif and Shmil. It took him quite an effort to obtain a permit to go abroad. He had to go to various authorities to prove his right to visit his brothers. Life abroad made a great impression on him. He used to criticize the soviet regime, but after he returned from France he said that even workers had very decent life there. My father wanted to move abroad and his French relatives offered their assistance, but he didn't want to go there alone and my family wanted to stay at home. My husband thought that he had reached his status here, he was an engineer and if he decided to move he would have to stand by a desk cutting fur for gloves. Uncle Iosif sent me an invitation to France. I went to the foreign passport office where they told me that people were allowed only to visit close relatives and uncles were not considered as such. I wasn't allowed to go.

After finishing school in 1968 my son went to serve in the army. He served in Volgograd and Khabarovsk region. After the army in 1972 Mikhail entered the Mechanical and Mathematic Faculty of Odessa University. After graduation he couldn't get a job due to his nationality. He picked up all kinds of jobs that he could get. In 1978 he married Marina Solodovnikova from Moscow and moved to live in Moscow. There he found a job of programmer that was his specialty. Irina is Russian. In December 1981 their daughter Olia was born. Irina works as a librarian at school. Her sister emigrated to Germany a long time ago. They could move there as well, but they didn't want to change their life. My granddaughter Olia studies at the Faculty of Sociology in a Pedagogical College. Unfortunately, I do not get along with my daughter-in-law. For this reason my granddaughter does not visit me.

In Brezhnev's epoch [1960s – 1970s] our life consisted of trying to get food and clothes. There was no meat or butter and there were no beautiful clothes. My son and I got up at six o'clock in the morning and went to the market. We stood in two lines waiting for meat to be delivered. If we managed to return home at three in the afternoon with meat we felt happy. My husband was allowed to buy food in special stores for invalids of the war. We called these stores 'thank you, Hitler'. We were allowed to buy 6 kg of miserable meat per month, some other products and clothes.

During Brezhnev regime I didn't vote in principle. My husband and I always had arguments because of this. He was very law-obedient and he couldn't believe it when I told him that somebody else would use my voucher. Once, for the sake of experiment I came to the polling station 15 minutes before their closure. A woman on duty told me that Minna Birman had already voted. I was indignant and they gave me a blank form. So I proved to my husband that I was right and never again went to vote. Our family was always interested in politics. We discussed all political news at home. Our children read a lot and were thoughtful personalities. We often took our son and daughter to theaters and museums.

When in the 1970s people began to move to Israel I was eager to go there, too, and obtained several invitations, but my children didn't want to go and here I am.

In 1976 my father died. He was buried in the 2nd Christian cemetery by my mother's grave. They lived their lives together and they lie beside each other.

In 1985 my husband died. Revmir was buried in the Tairovskoye cemetery [international town cemetery]. After my husband died my daughter and I had a difficult life. My brother Ilia didn't support us, although he could have. He worked as chief engineer of the Kislodmash plant. We had an argument when in 1982 he refused to contribute 1992. His wife Taya lives in Cheryomushki in Odessa. She has a two-bedroom apartment. Ilia's son Igor and I are friends. He often visits me. Igor is married to Tatiana, a nice Russian woman. He has a daughter named Lena. Igor is a computer specialist. He works in a private company.

My daughter Yekaterina changed few jobs. She worked as a chemist in Probirnaya Chamber, an engineer in design office 'Kinooborudovamiye' (cinema equipment) and an environmental chemist for sewerage facilities. During perestroika [27](#), when there were economic problems and she didn't get her salary regularly my daughter finished an accounting course. She worked as an accountant in Filatov Institute for 8 years. In 2002 Yekaterina retired, but she continues to work as an accountant in a trade company.

I accepted the beginning of perestroika with understanding. I think that Mikhail Gorbachev [28](#) is a very decent man. People blame him that perestroika failed, but I believe he did everything he could. He initiated changes, though in his position of the secretary he would have sufficient for the rest of his life. The situation couldn't develop any differently. The USSR lived on oil needle that was like drugs. It crashed, but Gorbachev has nothing to do with it. I felt negative about the breakdown of the USSR [29](#). It was all right for Baltic Republics where the mentality is different. I've always thought and believe it now that Ukraine lost from separation. There is no oil or woods, the coal is expensive and all industries were tied to the USSR. We argued a lot about it. My children told me that Ukraine gave Russia bread and we were feeding the USSR. I cannot say for sure whether perestroika failed or not. It failed in Ukraine. Life is better in Russia. Much failed because the

Russian Empire was always enslaved whether it was serfdom or Stalin's regime. People are not used to freedom and independence. I felt more comfortable living like that as well, but I realized that it was wrong. However, one felt rather calm receiving a fixed salary and knowing that employers wouldn't fire their employees.

Worked as an accountant in Chernomorniiproject for over 20 years. I literally worked for two. According to all existing standards I needed an assistant. I submitted requests for one many times, but nothing came out of it. I had to quit since I didn't get along with my boss who was a militant anti-Semite and it was difficult for me to work with her.

I live with my daughter. My son works as a programmer in Moscow maintaining computer networks of few companies. They are not considering moving abroad. The main reason is that they feel that they won't be able to follow the Western standards and merge into a different life. They identify themselves as Jews, but they are far from Jewish traditions. We do not celebrate Jewish holidays. I am not religious and my children aren't either. Back in the early 1980s I once went to the synagogue in Peresyp [in an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. I went to see how Jews celebrated Pesach. They sent me onto the balcony where I was standing behind other women where I couldn't see anything from behind. Another time I went to the Osipov synagogue some time in 1999. I went there to subscribe to the Jewish newspaper 'Shomrei Shabos'. It was a day off and there was a man on duty. I asked 'May I come in to look?' He replied 'Come in, are you a Jew?' 'Can't you tell?' 'Come in!' I came in and looked around. It beautiful, but it didn't stir any religious feelings in me.

I've been in touch with Jewish charity organizations for a long time since the early 1990s. At first I received humanitarian aid in the Palace of Culture named after Lesia Ukrainka in Tiraspol'skaya Square. When Gemilut Hesed began its activities I was almost the first one to enroll on its lists. My daughter and I receive food packages there. My daughter and I do sympathize with the rebirth of Jewish life in Odessa. We began to attend the Jewish center when it resided in the house of medical employees in Grecheskaya Street [late 1980s]. We also enjoyed attending concerts of cantors and performances of the Jewish Theater 'Shalom' that came on tour to Odessa several times. I am very much interested in the Jewish history and culture. I am now putting in order our family archive that is of interest to the community. Sometimes historians come to talk with me. I want to be of help to people.

Glossary

1 Russian Revolution of 1917

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

2 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It

meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

3 Civil War (1918-1920)

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

4 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)

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

5 Famine in Ukraine

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

6 ChK - full name VuChK - All-Russian Emergency Commission of struggle against counter revolution and sabotage

the first security authority in the Soviet Union established per order of the council of people's commissars dated 07 December 1917. Its chief was Feliz Dzerzhynskiy. In 1920 after the Civil War Lenin ordered to disband it and it became a part of NKVD.

7 German colonists

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

8 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the

USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

9 Collectivization in the USSR

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

10 Karl Marx (1818 - 1883)

the son of the Jewish lawyer who had converted to Christianity. Young Marx studied philosophy at the University of Berlin. He became a founder of so called "scientific socialism". His Communist Manifesto ends with such words: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, united!" The Marx' doctrine gained a great popularity by the Russian revolutionaries.

11 Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895)

Philosopher and public figure, one of the founders of Marxism and communism.

12 Lenin (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

13 Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934)

Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

14 Torgsin stores

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

15 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.

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

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

17 Kamenev, Lev Borisovich (1883-1936)

Soviet communist leader, member of the first Politburo of the Communist Party after the Revolution of 1917. After Lenin's death in 1924, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Kamenev was expelled from the Party in 1927, but he recanted, was readmitted, and held minor offices. He was arrested in 1934 accused of complicity in the murder of Kirov and was imprisoned. In 1936 he, Zinoviev, and 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

18 NKVD

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

19 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

20 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

21 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.

22 Levitan Yuriy Borisovich (1914-1983)

he famous wartime radio announcer. During the Great Patriotic War read the news from front.

23 Romanian occupation of Odessa

Romanian troops occupied Odessa in October 1941. They immediately enforced anti-Jewish measures. Following the Antonescu-ordered slaughter of the Jews of Odessa, the Romanian occupation authorities deported the survivors to camps in the Golta district: 54,000 to the Bogdanovka camp, 18,000 to the Akhmetchetka camp, and 8,000 to the Domanevka camp. In Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot, with the Romanian gendarmerie, the Ukrainian police, and Sonderkommando R, made up of Volksdeutsche, taking part. In January and February 1942, 12,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered in the two other camps. A total of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered by Romanian and German army units.

24 The Kursk battle

The greatest tank battle in history of WWII occurred at Kursk. It began on July 5th, 1943 and it ended ignominiously eight days later. The Soviet army in its counteroffensive crushed 30 German divisions and liberated Oryol, Belgorod and Kharkov. During the Kursk battle, the biggest tank fight – involving up to 1200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides – took place in Prokhorovka on 12 July 1943, and it ended with defeat of the German tank unit.

25 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

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

26 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

27 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.

28 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931)

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

29 Breakup of the USSR

Yeltsin in 1991 signed a deal with Russia's neighbours that formalized the break up of the Soviet Union. The USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).