

# Izia Antipka

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Kishinev

Moldova

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Izia Antipka lives in a big apartment in a many-storied apartment block on Izmailskaya Street not far from the center of Kishinev [Chisinau in Moldovan]. It's an old street with one-storied buildings built in the early 20th century. Izia, a short, slim, baldish man, looks young for his age. Izia's wife died a year ago. The apartment is nicely furnished: there are carpets on the floors, a Japanese TV set, a good hi-fi. One can tell that Izia is doing well in this respect. Izia gladly and very vividly describes his childhood and tells me about his relatives. Only when it comes to the moment when his grandfather and grandmother died, he lights a cigarette and stops several times during his speech. One can tell how hard it is for him. He is a great cook and talks with inspiration about making Jewish dishes that his mother used to make. He uses her recipes. The next time I visited him, he made cookies for me.

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I don't know anything about the origin of my surname: Antipka. They said this surname could have been possibly found among Polish Jews, and my paternal grandfather, Israel Antipka, was born in Poland in the 1860s, only I don't know the exact location. He had passed away before I was born. My grandfather's brother, whose name I don't know, settled in Kiev. My grandfather Israel Antipka settled in Bessarabia [1](#), in the small village of Flamynzeny, Orgeyev [Orhei in Moldovan] district. Israel married Yenta, a Jewish woman from Bessarabia; this is all I know about my grandmother's birth place. My grandfather grew corn and grapes, kept livestock and lived his life no different from other Moldovans, trying to earn their daily bread. My grandfather died in the early 1920s. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in the village.

I knew Grandmother Yenta well. She was about ten years younger than my grandfather. Yenta lived in a nice stone house in Flamynzeny. Yenta was moderately religious. She prayed at home every morning, wore a kerchief, lit candles on Friday evening and prayed over them, followed some of the kashrut rules: I mean, there was never any pork in the house, but she didn't have separate dishes for dairy and meat products. There was no synagogue in the village and on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Pesach, the main Jewish holidays, my grandmother went to the synagogue in Orgeyev. However, she never gave up work on Saturday. She had to take care of her garden and her livestock: chicken, ducks and geese. She also kept cows, and there was always milk, cottage

cheese and cream available for the household.

My parents often sent me to spend the summer with my grandmother Yenta. They called it 'health strengthening.' My grandmother was always happy to see me, but she always told me, 'Izeke, forget about the meat and stew that Mama makes for you, it's not good for your health, but you can always have chicken and duck.' My grandmother made perfect food for me. In the morning she made cottage cheese pudding with eggs, saying that there was no such rich milk in the whole town, as the one, from which she made pudding. There were four big rooms in her house. After my grandfather died, my grandmother divided the house into two parts: she and her single son Berl lived in one, and her son Aizek and his family lived in the other.

Israel and Yenta had six children: five sons and a daughter. I have no information about my father's sister: not even her name. All I know is that after Bessarabia was annexed to Romania [2](#), she lived with her family on the other bank of the Dniestr in the Soviet Union. My father's brothers were moderately religious: they celebrated the main holidays and observed some of the traditions.

Isaac, the oldest one, born in the 1890s, lived in a village near Orgeyev. I saw Isaac just a few times. I don't know what he did: I was small and took no interest in such things. Isaac died in the 1930s. His wife and two children, whose names I can't remember, evacuated in 1941. After the Great Patriotic War [3](#) they returned to Moldova. We had no contacts with them, and this is all I know.

My father came next in the family, and after him Aizek was born. Aizek had one leg shorter than the other. He was weak and couldn't do farmer's work. Aizek owned a small store, where he sold matches, kerosene, candles and salt that villagers bought from him. Aizek and his wife lived in the second half of my grandmother's house. Aizek had no children. His wife died in evacuation, in some place in Siberia and Aizek remarried in the late 1940s. He and his wife settled in Orgeyev. Aizek died in the mid-1960s. Aizek's son Mikhail, born in the late 1940s in his second marriage, lives in Israel. I have no contact with him.

The next son was my father's brother Moishe. He lived in another village. I hardly know anything about him. He was married, but he and his wife disappeared during the Great Patriotic War. Most likely, they failed to evacuate and perished in the occupied territory.

The youngest one, Berl, born in the 1910s, lived with his mother. Berl worked from morning till night. That was probably why he remained single. There were no other Jewish families in the village and he had no time to look around. My grandmother and Berl were killed by the Fascists in their village of Flamynzeny in 1941.

My father Samuil, Jewish name Shmil, Antipka was born in the 1890s. I don't know where he studied or whether he went to cheder. Most likely he started his studies with a melamed. Melamed teachers went around villages teaching Jewish children. My father started helping his father about the household at an early age. However, he had other ideas, rather than living his life in the village like his mother and father. When he turned 16, my father moved to Orgeyev, the district town. He went to work at the printing house where he became an apprentice and then a qualified printer. In the tsarist Russia printing workers were the most progressive ones: they read all the new editions, and were well aware of progressive ideas.

After Bessarabia was annexed to Romania, workers established an underground organization involved in Communist propaganda. My father was far from politics and didn't join this organization, but when the police organized a search at his printing house, he decided to risk it no longer and left the printing house. He became a broker. He arranged food supplies to two big restaurants in Orgeyev. He made deals with farmers and also supplied meat, butter, fruit and vegetables to these restaurants having his interest from those supplies. I don't know how my parents met. There may have been a shadkhan. They got married in 1924.

My mother came from Orgeyev. Her father, Srul Steinberg, born in the 1860s as was Israel [the paternal grandfather], worked in a 'monopolka' store [stores selling vodka which was the state monopoly in the tsarist Russia and Romania, too]. My grandmother Mariam owned a store. My grandmother joked that she managed a 'gas station.' There were just two cars in Orgeyev: the main transport means were horses and my grandmother sold food for the horses: oats, bran, etc. Jewish and Moldovan cabmen were Mariam's customers: they knew and respected my grandmother.

Orgeyev was a truly Jewish town at that time: 80 percent of its population was Jewish. Jews kept almost all stores and shops in the center of the town. Jewish doctors, lawyers and businessmen lived in the central part of the town. There was a number of synagogues, a Jewish hospital, and later the Joint [4](#) established and supported an affiliate of the Jewish Health Association. My grandmother and grandfather rented an apartment, though it was spacious and well-furnished. Grandfather Srul was very religious. On Friday, Saturday and holidays he went to the synagogue. The synagogues were guild-based: my grandfather Srul went to the nearby synagogue of shoemakers, though there were no shoemakers in our family. It was just the nearest synagogue from where my grandparents lived. There were six children in the family. They were raised to respect and observe Jewish traditions.

Hana, the oldest of all children, born in the 1890s, was a very beautiful woman, but she had one problem: she had a glass eye. She failed to find a decent match and in 1933 she moved to Palestine, following the Zionist ideas of the construction of a Jewish state. She got lucky and married a widower by the name of Lis. I don't remember his first name. Lis was rather wealthy. He owned a big two-storied house in a small town. On the first floor he arranged a café. Hana ran her household and raised her husband's children: she didn't have any of her own. Hana died in the mid-1980s, when she was very old.

The next in our family was Gershl. He moved to Palestine in the 1920s and from there he moved to the USA, because of the continuous troubles caused by the Arabs. He changed his name to Harry, got married and had two children. This is all I know about my uncle. In 1940, when the Soviet regime was established in Bessarabia [5](#), it became dangerous for the family to correspond with him and it stopped [6](#). All I know is that he died a long time ago, in the 1950s.

My mother was born between Gershl and Moishe, who came into this world in the 1900s. He was a very gifted person. After finishing a gymnasium with honors he went to Bucharest. Moishe was good at languages. He studied French and German at the gymnasium. In Bucharest Moishe went to work at a company selling Austrian manual knitwear units. Its owner was Arabadjiyev, a Bulgarian man. He valued my uncle for his good work and paid him well. Moishe got married and had two children: his daughter's name was Dodika and his son's name was Mikhail. When the Soviet regime

was established, Moishe and his family moved to Kishinev: almost all Jews in Bessarabia looked forward to the Soviet days. When the Great Patriotic War began, Moishe and his family evacuated, but disappeared somewhere in Krasnodarskiy Kray [today Russia].

Rachil, Mama's sister, born in 1904, the smartest of all the girls, studied in a gymnasium. However, she never finished it for reasons that I'm not aware of. Rachil married Musia Averbuch, a Jewish man from Orgeyev. Rachil returned to Orgeyev from the evacuation and later she moved to Kishinev. She died in 1975. Her children Alexandr and Mania moved to Israel in the late 1980s.

My mother's youngest sister Feiga, born in 1910, followed Moishe to Bucharest looking for a job. Soon she married Marcello Iosifzon, a Jewish man. It's a Romanian name, but I don't know his Jewish name. He was a rabbi's son. They were wealthy and didn't want to have any children before the war. In 1940 Feiga and Marcello and Moishe's family moved to Kishinev. During the Great Patriotic War they evacuated to Uzbekistan. Marcello was recruited to the labor army [7](#). After the war they returned to Kishinev. In 1947 their daughter Sonia was born. Later they had a son named Leonid. In the early 1970s the family moved to Israel where Feiga died at the age of 88. Her children and grandchildren live in Haifa in Israel. I know that they are happy with their life.

My mother, Sarrah Steinberg, was born in Orgeyev in the late 1890s. Like Rachil she finished several years in the gymnasium and then became an apprentice of the best dressmaker in town. Some time later she began to make clothes herself and became even better than her teacher. When she was young, my mother was fond of revolutionary ideas like many other young people in Bessarabia. She joined an underground Komsomol organization [8](#). My mother's group was arrested at their gathering in the town park where they were reading the novel 'Mother' by Maxim Gorky [9](#), which was forbidden in the capitalist Romania. My mother was arrested, kept in jail and tortured for a few days. She was beaten with a metal bar and taunted. The young people were released from prison only after Grousgend, a wealthy grain supplier, interfered and paid a bail for them. After she was released, she was introduced to my father. My parents got married in 1924. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at the synagogue. Everything was like it happened in religious Jewish families.

## Growing up

I was born on 10th January 1925. I was named Izia [full name Israel] after my grandfather. This name, Izia Antipka, was written down in my birth certificate. In 1930 Mama gave birth to my sister Leya. Later she changed her name to the Russian Lidia, or Lida for short [10](#) - and I will call her by this name.

I recall my childhood with a warm feeling: this was the time of overall love. My father worked as a broker. He often traveled to nearby villages and towns, buying food products and making deals with farmers. My mother was a first-class dressmaker. She owned a shop and had two employees working for her. Every evening our family got together for dinner and these were the warmest evenings in my life. We discussed events of the day, had delicious food and then Mama put me and my sister to bed and this was wonderful.

We rented apartments and there were three such apartments in my childhood and youth. When I was born we rented an apartment from Reznik, a Jewish owner. Then we moved to another apartment, which we rented from Batuzh, a Moldovan man. Before the Great Patriotic War we

rented an apartment from Mishkis, a Jewish owner. I remember this apartment best. It was big: there was a fore room with a coat-stand and a round table, covered with a velvet tablecloth, there was also a small living room, our parents' bedroom, the children's room and another room that served as my mother's shop. There was a big cutting table in it: an oak table with carved legs where Mama cut the fabric. There was also a Singer sewing machine that Mama was very cautious about.

We had a good life, enjoying good food and nice clothes that Mama made for us. However, my parents worked very hard to support the family. Mama also did all the housework herself: we never had a housemaid. She was an excellent housewife. Our neighbors asked her for advice. They brought their dishes for her to try: 'Madam Antipka, is there anything else to add here? Madam Antipka, is this jam ready?'

We had certain meals on certain days, and I could always guess what we were going to have tonight or tomorrow. Let me tell you starting from Friday night, when Mama cooked Saturday dinner before Sabbath. [Editor's note: In religious households dinner had to be complete and ready before Sabbath commenced on Friday evening] There was gefilte fish with walnuts – this was a tradition in Bessarabia – chicken broth or chicken stew. Jews used to say that if a Jew didn't have stuffed chicken neck [the neck stuffed with flour and onions fried on goose fat] on his table on Saturday, he was just not a Jew.

Mama also cooked Jewish beef stew. Real Jewish stew is cooked with beef brisket – no other meat is good for this stew. There has to be a little fat in the meat. It has to be cut in small pieces and fried with onions till the meat and the onions turn dark brown. Then boiling water is added, salt, spices, pepper and laurel and stewed till it's ready. If there was too much meat, Mama divided it into two portions and made sweet and sour stew. She added tomato paste and cherry jam plus sugar to make it sweet.

Another mandatory Saturday beverage is compote with black plums, and we also treated ourselves to tsimes [11](#). In Bessarabia tsimes was made with potatoes, beans, carrots, peas and local sweet peas. Peas were kept in water since the previous evening and then boiled a little. Then flour was fried in butter, then a fat chicken tail base was added, onions fried separately and then mixed with peas, sugar was added and that was it: delicious tsimes was ready. Tsimes was to be eaten cold and with white bread. On Saturday we had white bread on the menu. Only Mama didn't bake it, being very busy with her work. She sent me to buy fresh challah loaves in the store.

Now it's difficult to recall all the dishes and on which day of the week we had them. I remember that we always had cutlets, fried potatoes and borscht on Monday. In our location Jewish cuisine was affected by the Moldovan cuisine and vice versa. Mama often made mititei, a Moldovan dish that I make myself now. It's made from beef neck cut into pieces and left at room temperature for three hours. Then the pot is covered with a lid and the meat is placed in the cold – in a fridge and in the past it was kept in a cellar – for 24 hours. Then meat is to be ground with onions and garlic and some water and broth is added. Then sausages [meat balls] are made with this meat with the help of a special set installed on a meat grinder and fried in vegetable oil.

I wouldn't say that our family was really religious. Mama came from a more traditional family, though she didn't cover her head like her mother and grandmother, but she tried to observe all Jewish traditions. We always celebrated Sabbath. My father went to the synagogue wearing his

fancy suit. Jewish men used to have two suits in Orhei: a casual dark blue and a fancy brown one. My father had a fancy brown striped suit. On Friday Mama cleaned the apartment and cooked everything for Saturday, though on Saturday she didn't invite Moldovans to help her stoke the stove or serve the food. However, she didn't take a needle or scissors to work on Saturday. My father took me with him to go to the synagogue of shoemakers. The synagogue was in a small one-story building, but it was beautiful and had Venetian glass in its windows. Though my father went to the synagogue, he didn't follow the kosher rules. He liked pork a lot. It's even sinful to say that on Friday evening he used to send me to the Verbitskiy store to buy delicacies: smoked pork, which I liked with fat streaks and my sister liked the fillet part of it, my father also ate dried pork and fat. We also bought kosher goose sausage for Mama.

We spoke Yiddish to one another, but we also knew Romanian that we spoke to our neighbors. My parents also spoke Russian and often switched to it, when they didn't want my sister or me to understand what they were talking about, but we understood what they were saying. We celebrated Jewish holidays at home according to traditions.

On Pesach we took special fancy crockery from the attic. My father brought a big basket with matzah from the synagogue. Mama made many delicious dishes with matzah, and I also make them on holidays. She made matzah pudding and nice little pies. Matzah is crushed as fine as flour. For the filling: 300 g lung meat, 300 g liver and 600 g beef, plus fried onions and spices. These pies are to be fried. Besides the [Pesach] dishes required by the Haggadah, we had everything else on the table: the best and delicious gefilte fish, chicken broth, stew and little pies. Mama made a fancy cake for dessert. She made it with 100 nuts. My father conducted the seder reclining on cushions, and I asked him the four questions.

On Purim Mama was sure to cook a turkey that was the central dish on the table. There were also hamantashen filled with nuts, which was also different from the common filling in Belarus and the Ukraine. There was also traditional fluden on Purim. Nuts were mixed with honey and butter plus cookies, this mixture is melt on a small fire and spread on biscuit or waffles. We used to buy waffles in a store. There was also a carnival procession in the town on Purim. There was one even in 1936, when the snow covered the ground.

I often spent summers with my grandmother Yenta. She observed Jewish traditions even with more dedication than my mother. On Friday [evening] we celebrated Sabbath. My grandmother lit candles and the whole family got together at the table: Uncle Berl, Uncle Aizek and his family and I. We also spent some time in the mansion of my father's friend Bagdasarov, an Armenian man. Bagdasarov was a rich man. There were parquet floors in his mansion. The carpets were taken away in summer since it was too hot. We stayed in a guest house and enjoyed it very much.

At the age of seven I went to a Romanian elementary school. Most of my classmates were Jewish children. There were no prejudiced attitudes toward us and we also got along well. After I finished the elementary school my mother wanted me to go to the gymnasium, but I didn't quite want to continue to study. I liked doing things with my own hands and I went to the vocational school of the Jewish association Tarbut [12](#) where students were trained in crafts.

There were many Zionist organizations in Orgeyev like in other parts of Romania and there were also such organizations for young people. I joined the Hashomer Hatzair organization [13](#), which had a goal to struggle for the establishment of a Jewish state with peaceful methods of negotiations and

purchase of land. Each synagogue arranged for collection of contributions for this purpose. We also attended Maccabi [14](#), a sports organization, the only one that had gyms at its disposal in Romania. They were well equipped for all kinds of sports.

On Romanian holidays: the National Day of Romania, 1st December [Day of Unity, the greatest Romanian national day. On 1st December 1918 the unity of Transylvania and parts of Eastern Hungary with Romania was declared by the Romanian National Assembly in the Transylvanian city of Alba Iulia.] and the National Banner Day, 24th February, [Editor's note: This national day was introduced in Romania by a governmental decree at the 150th anniversary of the 1848 revolution in 1998. During the interwar period it didn't exist yet.] Jews made a separate column during the parade: we wore white trousers, dark blue caps and Magen Davids, and were the most attractive at the parade. There was also a Jewish brass orchestra in the town. I played the drums in it. There was also a football team. Grousgend, a wealthy manufacturer, sponsored the organization. He paid for uniforms, balls, sports equipment and musical instruments for the orchestra.

The Zionist propaganda was so strong that once the son of a Moldovan policeman, a former apprentice of the Jewish blacksmith Gohman, got so attracted by the idea of the establishment of a Jewish state that he decided to move to Palestine. Despite his father's efforts to convince him to stay at home, the guy left for Palestine and the whole town came to say good bye to him.

I studied in the Tarbut school for a year before I went to Bucharest to continue my studies. I entered the Jewish vocational gymnasium to study a vocation along with other subjects. This gymnasium also belonged to the Tarbut. Its main purpose was to train professionals for Israel. It was free of charge. It was a boarding school where Jewish guys from different Romanian villages and towns came to study. We had uniforms, were provided meals and had classes.

Of course, I missed home, the warm weather and delicious food. On Friday evenings I visited Aunt Feiga and we celebrated Sabbath. My aunt's husband Marcello was a real dandy. He had posh clothes and shoes to match each suit he had. Aunt Feiga also enjoyed life. She always treated me to delicious food, even more delicious than my Mama or grandmother Yenta made. I also joined the Bucharest division of Hashomer Hatzair, participated in competitions organized by the Maccabi and played football. There was a small stadium with just two stands for football fans: one for Moldovan and another one for Jewish fans. There were no confrontations between them, but the atmosphere was tense at times.

I took an interest in politics from an early age. I read a lot and followed all events. I knew about the situation in Fascist Germany and was interested in any bit of information about the Soviet Union. Many young Jewish people of Bessarabia were fond of Communist ideas and dreamt of living in the Soviet Union. My father and I often visited my father's friend Grinberg, a restorer, who had a radio: we held our breath listening to the Kremlin bells [signal of Radio Moscow] tolling at eleven o'clock in the evening [twelve Moscow time].

Mama had cousin brothers and sisters on her mother's side: Sura and Leika lived in Kishinev and Zigmund and Rachil, members of a Communist organization, decided to cross the border to the Soviet Union. In winter, when the river [Dniestr] froze, they crossed it and got to the USSR. This happened in 1934. In 1937, in the outburst of terror [15](#) they were arrested and exiled to the Gulag [16](#) as Romanian spies. They were released in the late 1950s. Zigmund moved to Moscow and Rachil went to Vilnius. They visited Kishinev in the late 1960s for the first time.

In 1938 the Cuzist [17](#) and legionary [Iron Guard] [18](#) Fascist parties [organizations] appeared in Romania. This affected Orgeyev immediately. Fascists with swastikas marched along our streets breaking windows in Jewish stores. [Editor's note: The symbol of the Iron Guard was three horizontal and three vertical green and black stripes. Wearing swastika, the symbol of the German Nazi party, was probably atypical.] Fortunately, this march never developed into a pogrom. In Bucharest where I spent two years I often saw young Fascist people and knew that they would cause much trouble to Jews. In early June 1940 I came to spend my vacation in Orgeyev after passing my exams. That year my father rented 20 hectares, planted soy beans and hired Moldovan workers expecting outstanding crops. He asked me to give him a hand with his work. My sister Lida, who studied in a gymnasium and was on vacation as well, and I often came to work in the field.

On 28th June 1940 the Red army came to Orgeyev! How it was met! Both brass orchestras of Orgeyev marched the streets playing the International [Anthem of the International Worker's Movement and of the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1943. Originally French, it has been translated into most languages and has been widely used by various Socialist and Communist movements worldwide.] and Soviet songs. Madam Reznik, the wife of a millionaire of Orgeyev, who owned mills, butteries, came out onto her balcony wearing a red satin gown to demonstrate that she was for the Soviets. I also dressed up and marched in a column with the others. We expected to see the well-equipped Red Army, but we were up for the first disappointment, when we saw the first soldiers. This was an Uzbek battalion: they were black, covered with dust, dirty, tired and exhausted. Many faces were affected with smallpox [a common disease in Central Asia], they were far from dashing! They wore wrappings and old boots and they were stinking and sweaty.

The next disappointment was when all food products disappeared from stores: the first ones to disappear were chocolates, caviar and other delicacies. There was no white bread, vegetable oil, flour, sugar, just essential commodities. The only candy was caramel in sugar. Fortunately, we had stocks in the attic that my father had kept for the restaurant. Aunt Rachil brought a bunch of boubliks [round pastries] from Kishinev and we had them instead of white bread. Almost all Jews arrived from Kishinev within the first three days, including Uncle Moishe and his family, Feiga and Marcello.

A few weeks later arrests began. Fortunately, the only harm we suffered was that they took away the soy field. The restaurant owners Blumis and Menis were exiled and so was Reznik and his family: Madam Reznik's demonstration of their loyalty was of no help. However, Reznik's children were allowed to stay in Orgeyev. I remember Moishe Frant, who owned a small grocery store, waved his hand to us, 'We'll be back,' getting into the militia car, but none of them ever returned from exile. Being used to a good life many of them died in Siberia. We couldn't understand the criteria on the basis of which they arrested people. For example, my father's friend Grinberg, a restaurant owner, escaped an arrest while Gruzgend, a democrat, for whom all of his employees begged, was sent to exile with his family and they all perished in Siberia. We gave shelter to Bagdasarov in our house, but somebody reported on him and he was arrested. My father went to work as supply supervisor in the fruit and vegetable supply office Moldplodoovosch. My sister and I went to the Russian Soviet school. We had no problems with the Russian language hearing it often at home. So a year passed.

During the war

On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. We listened to Molotov's [19](#) speech. I insisted on evacuation. My father was against it saying that war would not last long and we would manage staying in the caves near Orgeyev, having food stocks with us. However, my mother shared my point of view and we decided to evacuate. Uncle Musia, my mother sister's husband, working in the military registry office, managed to arrange a wagon for us. We loaded our belongings: carpets, suitcases, food and even my mother's sewing machine onto this wagon. In early July our family, Rachil and Musia, Grandmother Mariam and Grandfather Srul left our town.

We reached a village by the [Dniestr] river waiting for our turn to cross it. There were crowds of people, wagons, military, cars at the crossing. The priority was given to battle forces. We decided to move on separately. Uncle Musia had a map and we agreed on the spot where we would meet. My grandmother Mariam, my mother and I, Rachil and my sister crossed the Dniestr, and my father, uncle Musia and my grandfather, who couldn't walk, stayed on the wagon waiting for their turn to cross the river.

The German troops were not far away from this area. They bombed the road and there were dead people all around. It took us a few days to reach the town of Grigoriopol on the border with Ukraine [on the Ukrainian side] where we rented an apartment waiting for the rest of our family. My father and Musia caught up with us soon. They told us that grandfather Srul had died and they buried him in a field. Grandmother Yenta and Uncle Berl also arrived at Grigoriopol on a wagon. They didn't stay long. Some military – I think he was a German spy – convinced them to go back home. He said the war wouldn't last and the Red Army would soon go in attack. Grandmother Yenta and Uncle Berl went back home. After the war we got to know that some villagers gave them shelter, but then their former Moldovan neighbor reported on them. Uncle Berl and Grandmother Yenta were shot by the Fascists at the very beginning of the occupation.

My mother's brother Moishe, his wife and children also arrived at Grigoriopol. Moishe went back to Kishinev to pick up his younger sister. He brought Feiga and Marcello with him. Later he, his wife and their children disappeared somewhere in the Krasnodarskiy Kray. We tried to find them, but never received any information about them.

We left Grigoriopol on our wagon. We went all across the south and eastern part of Ukraine. We got a warm welcome wherever we arrived. We were accommodated and provided with some food. We also got some food to go, though it was just some salty cheese and dull bread. We stopped in Kirovograd region at the kolkhoz [20](#), established in the 1930s with the support of Agro-Joint [21](#). I was surprised to see how different Jewish women looked here, wearing Ukrainian skirts and embroidered blouses and kerchiefs. We were given accommodation.

My father and I went to work at the grain elevator: there was an outstanding crop that year and we worked delivering grain to the elevator. After two-three weeks we had to move on. Fascist landing troops landed in Pervomaysk and the Jewish kolkhoz [22](#) evacuated hastily. I remember that my mother made dough to bake bread that evening and she put the pot on our wagon when we had to leave. We moved without stopping for a few days. We crossed the Southern Bug and then the Dniepr. There were a few pontoon crossings operating. We had excellent horses. I think they pulled the wagon feeling the threat over us. They never let us down.

We finally stopped after crossing the Dniepr. We were hungry. The dough got sour, but Mama made some flat bread from it on the fire nevertheless. We stayed a few weeks in Mariupol. I liked

the town very much: there were big trees, wide avenues, the sea – everything was new to me. Then we went on, crossed the Don and reached Bataysk, Rostov region in Russia [about 900 km from Kishinev]. There were catering points arranged for the evacuating people. We were provided the ration of goat cheese and bread. Papa got some tomatoes and fried crucian carps and we settled for a meal by the wagon. A thin shabby guy approached us and my father recognized the son of our neighbor Reznik. He told us he was on the go just by himself. Mama gave him some food and he left. In Bataysk the military took away our wagon and horses for the needs of the front. They gave us a letter promising to return what they had taken away after the war. We took a train heading farther to the east.

Our trip lasted for about a month. We had no idea where we were going. There was a lot of mess during the trip, some people missed the train, some got on it at the stops. There was a lot of crying, diseases and deaths: people were dying and there was no time or place to bury them. We arrived at the border [area] between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the station of Yakkabag Kazakhdarya region [today Uzbekistan], almost 3000 kilometers from home. When we got off the train we were welcomed by Uzbek people wearing their gowns and turbans. My grandmother asked my father in Yiddish, ‘Where are we, in a desert?’

The Uzbek people gave us tea and flat bread. We went to a kolkhoz. I was surprised to see how poor the Uzbek people were. There were clay huts with just holes instead of windows and doors, with just poles covered with clay on the roof. We were accommodated in one hut. It was awfully cold there: the wind was blowing through all the openings. My father decided we should move to the district town of Chirchiq, the word means ‘lamp’ in Uzbek. Papa went to the town and bumped into Moldavskiy, a Jewish man from Odessa [23](#), who was in evacuation with his wife and son. My father sold his posh brown suit, Moldavskiy also added something and they bought a shabby hut of one room and a kitchen. My mother’s work table was in the middle of the room and we accommodated around it. There were four of us left: Mama, Papa, my sister and I. Aunt Rachil and Grandmother Mariam moved to a nearby village. She died in 1943. She was buried without any ceremony in the village cemetery.

Our life was very hard, the bread that we received by cards [24](#) was too little. Mama sewed a lot and her clients paid her with food for her work. One woman was a shop assistant selling bread and she brought us a loaf of this sticky bread, which looked like soap. I had to help the family and became an apprentice of a blacksmith: he gave me food for my work. Later my father and Marcello – he and Feiga also lived in Uzbekistan – were mobilized to the labor army [mobilized to do physical work for the army], my father earned well and supported us. My father and Marcello worked near Moscow. Their Uzbek comrades didn’t want to work and starved themselves to exhaustion to be sent back home. My father and Marcello were to escort them. So he managed to visit us a few times, bringing flour, sugar, tinned meat or even sausage.

### After the war

In September 1944, when Bessarabia was liberated, my father went to Kishinev and sent us a letter of invitation from there. We went back home. In Tashkent our luggage was stolen, but it was a minor problem, considering that how happy we felt going back home. Rachil, Musia, Feiga and Marcello gathered for a family council and decided it didn’t make sense to go back to Orgeyev. My father said it was only possible to live in a bigger town during the Soviet regime. At least it’s

possible to get some food products. There were many abandoned apartments in the town and we moved in one on Kievskaya Street. Our neighbors from Orgeyev told us who had taken our belongings and we went there to pick them, but we only managed to get back my mother's cutting table.

Life was improving. My father went back to work in the Moldplodoovoschtorg [Moldovan state-owned fruit and vegetable dealer] office. Mama continued with her sewing, but she couldn't work as much as she did before the war. I finished school, of course, I was over aged, but there many such children at that time.

I was conscripted to the army in 1947. I was taken to the school of junior aviation specialists. After finishing it I served as supervisor at the air field in Balashikha near Moscow. Our commanders were very good to us. Once I was granted a leave home under the condition that I would bring a canister of wine before the New Year. I spent a whole month in Kishinev. In 1948 my commandment ordered me to go to an airfield in Bucharest since I was the only one, who knew Romanian. I had two soldiers with me: Kharitonov, a Russian guy, and Bagdasarov, an Armenian guy. We had no money with us: we only received a food ration. I picked some underwear from the storage, knowing that it was in great demand. On the way to Bucharest we stopped in Iasi [175 km north of Bucharest] where I bumped into my second cousin. This happened to be the Purim holiday and we spent the whole evening with her celebrating the holiday. This was the first time the guys tried hamantashen.

When we arrived in Bucharest I sold the clothes I had with me in a lady's washroom. Now we had some money. This was a great risk: if we were stopped by a Soviet patrol we would have problems. Besides, we left our luggage and guns in the left luggage and all of this to go to the red-light district [brothels]. I didn't care, but my comrades insisted that we went there; there was nothing of the kind in the USSR and prostitution was forbidden and strictly punishable. I took them to this street where girls in underwear were sitting before front doors. Seeing handsome Soviet guys they really jumped on us. Bagdasarov got frightened and we escaped. We spent the money we had in street cafes and on street shoe cleaners to polish our boots. We also had our pictures taken as a souvenir. This funny story only proves that I had no problems serving in the army.

Upon demobilization from the army I returned to my parents in Kishinev. Uncle Musia helped me to get a job at the meat grinder repair shop. I became an apprentice, a foreman and later a superintendent and worked at this shop my whole life. I also entered the Dnepropetrovsk College of Railroad Transport, but I never finished it due to my illness. I had psoriasis that acquired an acute form during examinations and my doctors advised me to quit my studies due to the stress this caused. There were mainly Jewish employees in the shop and its director was Moldovan. The anti-Semitism in the early 1950s didn't affect us, though Jewish chief engineers were fired. I kept working without any problems. Once I visited a tobacco factory, when I was chief of technical supervision. I met Alina Litvak, a Jewish girl, who worked at this factory. I liked her and we began to see each other. Then we fell in love with each other and I proposed to her.

Alina was born in the town of Rybnitsa in 1929. She didn't remember her father, Ilia Litvak, who died long before the Great Patriotic War, when Alina was just a small child. During the Great Patriotic War Alina and her mother were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa. Her mother, whose name I don't remember, died in the ghetto. Alina and her sister Fania, who was a few years older than her,

survived. After the war Alina lived with her aunt in Kishinev. After finishing a secondary school she went to work as a lab assistant at the tobacco factory. We had a small wedding party with my parents, relatives and a few friends. Of course, it was a common wedding with no chuppah. After the war we didn't observe Jewish traditions, though we celebrated holidays, particularly Pesach, and my father always brought matzah from the synagogue.

After the wedding we lived with my parents for some time. My sister married Alexandr Goldstein, a Jewish man from Kishinev. Lida was a pharmacist and Alexandr was a railroad engineer. My sister and later I received apartments from his organization. Our parents stayed in their apartment. They lived a long life. My father died in the mid-1980s, and my mother lived 95 years. At the age of 90 she got bedridden and remained in this condition till she died in 1995. We buried our parents according to Jewish traditions, wrapped in takhrikhim, at the Jewish cemetery and the prayer [kaddish] was recited over their graves.

We lived a good life. I earned well and was promoted to site superintendent in 1955. My wife joined the Communist Party. After about ten years of work she became chief of her laboratory, a forewoman and then shop superintendent. We didn't have a car or a dacha [25](#), but we always spent vacations at the seashore or in a recreation center. We bought good food and clothes, often went to theaters and concerts. We celebrated birthdays and always invited friends and relatives. We also got together with friends on Soviet holidays to go to the river bank or to a forest and have a picnic and barbecue. We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays, but we visited our parents where my mother treated us to all kinds of delicacies: she was an excellent cook.

In 1954 our son Ilia was born. We named him after his maternal grandfather. Ilia studied well. He finished the electromechanical technical school and worked at a plant. He never mentioned to me if he ever faced everyday anti-Semitism. Our family benefited well from perestroika [26](#). My son managed to use his commercial talent. He started from little and now he owns a big casino. In 1998 Ilia married Inna, a Russian girl, who is much younger than him. In 2003 their son Gera, my grandson, was born. They live their own life. I have little in common with my daughter-in-law, but my son helps me a lot.

My wife Alina, a holy person, a kind soul, with whom I lived a beautiful life together, died in 2003. It's hard for me to accept that she is not with me any longer. My sister, her husband and their daughter Inna moved to Israel in the early 1990s. My sister died in 2000. My wife and I visited Israel a few times. It's a magical country created by people's hands and hard work, but it's full of sunshine and light. We liked everything there: the warm sea, nice people and delicious cuisine. It's a paradox that I, a member of a Zionist organization in my youth and a supporter of the establishment of a Jewish state, have stayed here. I always wanted to move there, but at first my wife was against it, later my son didn't want to go there and then I gave up the thought of it. What would I do there, a lonely old man, who doesn't speak the language.

When Moldova became independent, it established all conditions for the development of the Jewish nation. I wouldn't state there is no routine anti-Semitism and I've faced it every now and then, but we have our community, the Hesed [27](#), and it provides assistance to me as its client, the association of Jewish organizations. I've not become religious, but I often attend various events. I join my friends to celebrate holidays at the synagogue or in the Hesed, we share our memories and recipes of the Jewish cuisine: I know many from my mother. I've also enjoyed sharing my memories

with you.

## Glossary

### **1 Bessarabia**

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

### **2 Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution, the national assembly of Moldovans convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldovan state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldovan capital in January 1918. Upon Moldova's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania: the Moldovans accepted the annexation without any preliminary condition.

### **3 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.

### **4 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of Communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **5 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

## **6 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

## **7 Labor army**

it was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war.

## **8 Komsomol**

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

## **9 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

## **10 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid

discrimination.

## **11 Tsimes**

Stew made usually of carrots, parsnips, or plums with potatoes.

## **12 Tarbut schools**

Elementary, secondary and technical schools maintained by the Hebrew educational and cultural organization called Tarbut. Most Eastern European countries had such schools between the two world wars but there were especially many in Poland. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the education was Zionist oriented.

## **13 Hashomer Hatzair**

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

## **14 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite for the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

## **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 Gulag**

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

## **17 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent Fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. In 1919 Cuza founded the LANC, which became the National Christian Party in 1935 with an anti-Semitic program.

## **18 Iron Guard**

Extreme right wing political organization in Romania between 1930-1941, led by C. Z. Codreanu. The Iron Guard propagated nationalist, Christian-mystical and anti-Semitic views. It was banned for its terrorist activities (e.g. the murder of Romanian prime minister I. Gh. Duca) in 1933. In 1935 it was re-established as a party named 'Everything for the Fatherland', but it was banned again in 1938. It was part of the government in the first period of the Antonescu regime, but it was then banned and dissolved as a result of the unsuccessful coup d'état of January 1941. Its leaders escaped abroad to the Third Reich.

## **19 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On 22nd June 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **20 Kolkhoz**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4 percent of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **21 Agro-Joint (American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation)**

The Agro-Joint, established in 1924, with the full support of the Soviet government aimed at helping the resettlement of Jews on collective farms in the South of Ukraine and the Crimea. The Agro-Joint purchased land, livestock and agricultural machinery and funded housing construction. It also established many trade schools to train Jews in agriculture and in metal, woodworking, printing and

other skills. The work of Agro-Joint was made increasingly difficult by the Soviet authorities, and it finally dissolved in 1938. In all, some 14,000 Jewish families were settled on the land, and thus saved from privation and the loss of civil rights, which was the lot of all except for workers and peasants. By 1938, however, large numbers left the colonies, attracted by the cities, and most of those who stayed were murdered by the Germans.

## **22 Jewish kolkhoz**

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

## **23 Odessa**

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

## **24 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **25 Dacha**

country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

## **26 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of the 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.

## **27 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos

Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint, Hesed helps Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.