



*Different Lives,
A Common Story*

This book was published as part of the Experiential Learning Practicum offered by the Russian Studies Program at Brandeis University in partnership with the Brandeis-Genesis Institute for Russian Jewry. The publication is supported by the Adam and Matan Adelson Multigenerational Program at Hebrew Rehabilitation Center in Roslindale, MA, and a grant from the Genesis Philanthropy Group.



CONTENT

Introduction	4
Student reflections.....	5
Iosif Naumovich Boguslavsky.....	8
Mira Borisovna Krupkina	20
Naum Grigorievich Hayut.....	28
Raisa Samoylovna Chigrinskaya	34
Zoya Grigorievna Ofengeym	46

In the fall semester 2015, a group of students from Brandeis University participated in a project called “Individual Lives, A Common Story” at Hebrew Rehabilitation Center (HRC) in Roslindale, MA. This is the 5th year of the project; since 2013 it is run as part of a special course led by professor Irina Dubinina, the director of the Russian language program at Brandeis University. The practicum is based on principles of experiential learning, which emphasize connecting the knowledge received in the classroom with real-life issues that exist in our society, and inviting students to reflect on the knowledge gained from real-life experiences. During the semester, the students who grew up in Russian-speaking families in the U.S. were engaged in an intensive language practice while interviewing the elderly residents of HRC about their lives. The interviews were then discussed with the instructor who helped students understand the historical and cultural contexts of some of the events mentioned by the elders, analyzed and transcribed. This collection features five oral histories collected by Brandeis students in the fall of 2015.

The following students participated in the project: Shahzoda Nasimi, Yan Shneyderman, Idelle Vaynberg, David

Eydus, and Alena Gomulina. The oral histories recorded by these students include tales of a pre-war childhood, of the Great Patriotic War and evacuation, of life in the occupied territories, of hunger during and after the war, of return to the demolished cities after the Victory, of life’s joys and challenges, of the births of children and grandchildren, of anti-Semitism and friendship between people of different ethnicities, of love and dedication to one’s profession, and of emigration. A major theme that is visible in all stories is the Great Patriotic War (the part of WWII fought largely on the Soviet territory), and many of the interviewees divide their lives into two unequal parts - before and after the war. For the students, oral histories told by the elders serve as illustrations to the dry historical facts they learned at school, but often these stories teach them something new, something they were not even aware of before the start of the project.

We are grateful to all participants of the project and hope that this collection of life stories will serve as a proof of Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s words that “there are no uninteresting people in the world; the life of each individual is like a history of a planet.”



*“Individual Lives, A Common Story”:
participating students share their reflections*

In the fall semester 2015 we had a unique and valuable opportunity to learn first-hand about the lives of the generation of Russian speakers who survived World War II, experienced hardships in the USSR, and eventually emigrated to the United States. We had weekly meetings with our elderly friends when we talked and shared experiences. We hope that the life stories we present in this collection will help bridge the intergenerational gap and foster a better understanding of the older generation by college-age readers.

Yan Shneyderman



“Throughout my visits to HRC and conversations with Raisa, I have learned how essential respect is. Respect for others is a foundation of human decency, but self-respect is equally important. Raisa taught me that one should live the way he would be fond of recollecting later in life and that one should never lose self-respect in the face of obstacles.”

Idelle Vaynberg



“The Oral History project at Hebrew Rehabilitation Center was a very enriching and interesting learning experience. Listening to and understanding the stories of the older generation was eye-opening for me, and allowed me to have a sense of ‘living history.’ I have learned so much about my own history. This project added greatly to what I already know about my grandparents’ stories.”

David Eydus



“The project was important for me in several ways. I had a chance to learn about a family with a story similar to my own, tracing events back to pre-revolutionary Russian Empire. I now better understand my parents’ decision to leave Russia and only wish my great-grandparents did it before the cruel events of the 20th century. I also better understand the complex personal relations at the turbulent time of emigration. I feel the joy and pain of those recently settled in the new land. And of course, my Russian moved up to a new level.”

Shahzoda Nasimi



“The experience of learning about a very difficult life of a person who overcame unbearable difficulties cannot be taken lightly. I had the honor to record a story of a woman who survived horrible tragedies. Our conversations brought me closer to her and to her family. Listening to Mira, I was imagining my own ancestors whom I never knew. Participating in the Oral Histories project had a great impact on me and ignited my desire to work on preserving memories of the older generation.”

Alena Gomulina



“Oral history has sustained cultures and traditions across the globe. Through the centuries we have lost many stories, forgot many details and rewrote things we could not recall. To capture the story of a life lived, a love lost or an adventure had is a privilege and an honor. My experience is a profoundly humbling one, turning the mirror on my own privilege to never have to find my home town erased from the map. Reading about Jewish struggles is not the same as putting a face to them. Thank you, Naum, for sharing your memories with me.”

Iosif Naumovich Boguslavsky

Recorded by Idelle Vaynberg

Childhood

Iosif was born in 1930 in Leningrad into the family of a military engineer and a music teacher. He was an only child: “at that time it was fashionable to have one child.” Iosif was named after his mother’s father, Iosif’s grandfather.

Iosif did not know his grandparents, except for his grandfather on his father’s side. Parents on the mother’s side died tragically: “They lived in a provincial town, and my grandfather was a very famous man, a merchant. The town where they lived was called Vinnitsa, a small town,

which passed from hands to hands during the Civil War: first the Whites, then the Reds. When the White Army captured the town, they took my grandfather as a hostage. They shot him, and my grandmother, who loved him immensely, committed suicide because of this. I only saw my grandmother in photographs. A stout lady, with necklaces...”

Iosif’s parents were originally from Ukraine; his mother was born in Vinnitsa, and his father – in the city of Lubny (now the Poltava region of Ukraine). In his father’s family there were 8 sons and one daughter; all the men were hat makers, and in Iosif’s words, they were ‘typical shtetl Jews.’ Iosif knows that one of his father’s brothers went to America in 1912 and lived for some time in New York. At some point Iosif even had a list of passengers from the ship that arrived in New York that year, and saw his uncle’s name there. However, after a year, Honan appeared again on the passenger list of a different ship. Iosif says that his uncle moved to London because he met a

beautiful girl and left America for her. From there all traces of him are lost.

Naum, Iosif’s father, decided to study engineering instead of being a hat maker,



and attended the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute. By that time, he had already met his future wife – Dina, and they moved to Leningrad together.



Iosif, 1948

From his childhood, Iosif remembers most of all how his mother made him learn to play the violin. He went to a music school with a music folder on strings and felt very embarrassed before his friends. He only played the violin for 4 years. His childhood memories also include various political events from that time period: “It was a difficult time, but I remember in 1936 when I was six, I was taken to the most important holiday in our country, the Election Day, and I remember the building where it was taking place. My mother and father took me to the polls where they had to elect deputies. And I remember when Kirov was killed...”



When the war began, Iosif was 11 years old. He recalls that he learned about the beginning of the war from the radio: “I was in Leningrad, and Molotov announced

¹ It was called The Obukhovsky factory before the October Revolution. The factory was renamed again in 1992, with the original name restored.

on the radio that the war began. I was 11 years old and I already understood what war is.” Iosif’s father did not fight at the front. He was an engineer, and during the entire war he worked at a military factory ‘The Bolshevik’¹ which produced heavy artillery.

Iosif and his mother were evacuated from Leningrad at the beginning of the war to Stalingrad, as they thought at the time, to the rear. His father remained in Leningrad with the factory. Iosif says that they were evacuated by the Mariinsky water system², which connects the Volga basin to the Baltic Sea: “We were loaded on a special barge and sent to Stalingrad.” In July 1941, the factory transferred part of its equipment and a group of workers and engineers, including Iosif’s father, to Stalingrad. “Then it became clear that Stalingrad was not actually in the rear. I ended up in a very dire military situation in Stalingrad. There were terrible bombings, Nazi air raids. I was once saved by a colleague of my father, who saw me on the street. The bombing started, he took me by the collar and threw me into a trench to shield from the bombs. That’s why I

² The water system, which spans 1,125 km, was built during the reign of Paul I and his son Alexander I. In 1959-1964 the water system was remodeled and was named the Lenin Volga-Baltic Water Way.

can talk to you today. I could have died under those bombs. We were hiding in bomb shelters until we were evacuated to Siberia. It was 1941. I remember this time very well.”

It looks like Iosif spent about a year in Stalingrad, but according to him, they did not live there long. This time the entire family was evacuated further east: his father was evacuated with the factory and caught up to his wife and son on the way to Siberia. Iosif remembers: “We were in the town of Yurga, east of Novosibirsk. It is a small village lost in the snow. But there was a military factory there. We lived there a year. My father worked, I went to a Siberian school - my mother tried to ensure that I didn’t fall behind. Then came the Soviet Army’s victories, and my father was transferred to Moscow, and we followed him there. We lived in Moscow for a year; he worked in a factory, and I was in the seventh grade.”

Iosif remembers one interesting encounter during the war: “...there was a very important emigrant from Poland, Volf Messing³. He escaped from the Nazis to Russia. He had a fantastic mind. He could

³ Volf Messing was a famous seer and psychic who allegedly taught KGB officers his method of reading people’s minds.

predict many important events. By some random chance, he came to a forsaken Yurga to give a demonstration of his skills. This is what it was like: he would take a ‘recipient’ by the arm, hold his pulse and learn his thoughts! A colleague of my father wanted to test Messing and wrote some questions on a piece of paper, and Messing guessed what was written on the paper. I confirm that he guessed correctly!”

When the war ended, Iosif was 15 years old. He says that he did not understand the gravity of what was happening after the war because he was too young. He returned to Leningrad as soon as the blockade was lifted and started the eighth grade of school in the eighth grade: “Then there were separate schools for boys and girls. Before the start of classes each day the whole school would line up on the quay. My school was located on the Fontanka embankment. And we marched to an orchestra. This was called ‘military training.’ Classes began only after such exercises.”

Education

Although Iosif considers himself a “humanities-oriented person,” he decided to enroll in a legal studies department after finishing school. “I was accepted although there were quotas for Jews then. Jewish boys had to have above a certain grade, and Jewish girls had to have an even higher score to be accepted. I passed the entrance exams with high marks, and



Iosif, his wife and their class mates, 1953

my future wife managed to do well as well and was also accepted. And that’s how we met.”

Answering the question of why he

chose such a profession for himself, Iosif says: “Because of my romantic views of the profession. I had been reading about Sherlock Holmes. I had excellent grades, and I had a diploma with honors. But in the course of my studies I realized that for me, a Jewish guy, there is no bright future in the legal profession. I had to think of something more serious. I had not yet completed my legal education, when I started thinking about a technical degree.” As soon as Iosif graduated from the university with a degree in legal studies, he enrolled in absentia in the Leningrad branch of the Moscow Polygraphic Institute. For some time he worked part time as a legal specialist and ‘pecked’ at technical subjects, then went to work in a publishing house and became a technical worker. From the publishing house, Iosif went to the Polygraphic Planning Institute, where he worked first as an engineer, then as a senior engineer, and then became the unit leader.

Iosif tells us that at the university he had many friends, some of whom are still living, although many have passed away. Those who are still alive have not forgotten each other: “My school friend, with whom I sat at the same desk, called me yesterday from Leningrad!”

Love and Marriage

Iosif got married after his graduation from the university (legal studies department) in 1952, at age 22. Here is how he describes meeting his wife: “I was on the tram going to the university along the Nevsky Prospect. And in the first car of this tram I saw a young woman. This was my future wife. It turned out we were in the same year. We continued our friendship until marriage.” By the time of the wedding, Iosif and Maria had known each other for 5 years: “It was a logical continuation of our friendship-love.”

Maria, Iosif’s wife, was born in Poltava in 1929 and was “a whole year” older than him. She moved to Leningrad with her parents when she was a child. Iosif recalls that she was very beautiful and very talented: “I brought her home to meet my parents. My parents treated her kindly

and warmly. My wife respected my parents her entire life. Her parents were Orthodox Jews, and for them it was important, that their daughter marry not a Russian, but a Jew. My father-in-law was so glad of the fact that I was a Jewish boy, because it could have been not so...” Iosif’s father-in-law took him to the only synagogue in Leningrad and presented his future son-in-law to his ‘colleagues.’ That was the end of Iosif’s introduction to the religious Jewish community.

Iosif and Maria celebrated their wedding at home and very modestly, as it was 1952: “It was impossible to organize it magnificently, we had nothing. We celebrated in our apartment, our neighbors helped. At the wedding there was only my family and closest friends.



Iosif with his mother, 1950

Everything was modest – celebration,

dancing... Today it sounds funny. My parents gave us the rings. We were students and could not afford them ourselves. The wedding was in the winter, and she was cold. There were no resplendent dresses... Most of all I remember a friend of mine from the university who tried to court my cousin at the wedding, although nothing came of it..." Iosif tells us that at that time Jews could not organize a religious wedding ceremony.

In 1952 Iosif and Maria had a daughter Tanya. She became a successful doctor. Iosif says that his daughter always did everything well; from kindergarten, she was a good student. Since Jews were practically not accepted to medical



Iosif with his wife and daughter, 1962

schools, she had to attend a different university. She worked in emergency medical services. Tanya has a son, Evgeny, who now also lives in Boston. He is 32. He graduated from Tufts University and works as an engineer, designing buildings. He is married and has a child. Iosif's great-granddaughter Maya is two and a half years old. "I hope that in a year or two we will sing American songs together," says Iosif.



Iosif considers his move to the United States to be the happiest moment of his life: "Can you understand the state of liberation we felt on the plane from Vienna to Rome, and then to the USA?! It was a happy time!"

He began thinking about emigration early, but it took him a while to make the



Iosif in Israel

his emigration: "I did not see anything promising for me. For my grandson I saw the Soviet Army in his future. And that is a nightmare. That was enough to get me onto the path to emigration. We left in 1990: my daughter, son-in-law, grandson, my wife and I. We had to clean up our apartment and renovate it. First, we were required to go to Italy. And it was a very difficult period for us there. We had to stay there for several months. There we were hungry and cold. From the very beginning of the process, we decided that it would be America, we insisted on America... Having arrived in Vienna, we said that we would go to America, which made the Israeli embassy displeased." In Italy, there was

final decision. The reason for emigrating has to do with the heavy anti-Semitic atmosphere in the country at the time. This is how Iosif describes

a long waiting period for permission to enter the United States. Iosif remembers that they had little money in Italy. They brought some things for sale or trade, but it was not enough.

"At that time the Belgian Consulate represented Israel's interests in Moscow. We had to go to Moscow, notarize our documents and wait. We waited 4 or 5 months. Then they told us to give up our apartment and pay for everything. I left with a sense of liberation. I felt calmness and satisfaction. A few relatives stayed in Russia, but they are not the closest. I took a few books with me into emigration. We were allowed only a minimum amount of belongings. I managed to send a large part of my library by mail. When I came to America, my books met me here, at the home of my children's friends. They had a house and an attic where they could store the books. In Boston we had a trustee who vouched for us. These were our friends and their children. That is why we came to Boston."

Asked if there was anything he was sad to leave behind in the Soviet Union, Iosif replies: "Nothing was difficult to leave



Iosif with his daughter and son-in-law, USA, 1999

behind. It's the future that seems difficult, the old stuff is not important. I am not touched by the birch trees or the Soviet songs..."

Iosif says that he knew a lot about America before emigration: "I was well-read. While my mother was alive, and she died shortly before our emigration, she would buy the "America" magazine every month. We had to pay the girl at the kiosk to set aside the magazine, and we paid for it at a double rate. But this way we had an idea of what kind of country the USA was. We also received letters. We knew that it was a prosperous country where you have to work hard to get results. We were prepared for this."

When asked what the biggest surprise was upon arriving in America, Iosif

answers: "The stores! Against the backdrop of the dull empty Soviet stores, American stores amazed us. Other things too were amazing... Not everything here is wonderful. There are things which are tough, and complex..." Almost everything Iosif saw in the U.S. matched his idea of America before his departure from the USSR. He believes that if he had not moved to the U.S., his life would have ended 15-20 years ago: "I would not have survived the health issues, difficulties with the amputation there..."

Iosif speaks English passively, i.e. he can read with a dictionary. Although at school he learned German, thanks to his mother, he had a private tutor who gave him basic knowledge of the English language. It is interesting that despite limited spoken English, Iosif translated texts, mostly biographies of famous people, for Russian immigrants and published them in the most popular Russian emigre newspaper 'The New Russian Word.' He published many articles, in which he explained American life and told about famous Americans. These articles were later published as

a collection of stories about the most successful people in science and culture titled 'The American Success.'

Iosif says: "I was always drawn to pen and paper although I was an engineer. After emigration it was too late for me to start a working career here, and I found myself on this writing path. I was able to change, I found an ability to express my thoughts in a sensible and interesting way... I gave speeches to Russian-speaking audiences. I began writing in America 3 years after emigrating. Back in the USSR, I was interested in Vysotsky⁴ and even then wrote a little about him. I had tapes of his songs, and I performed before audiences analyzing his songs."



"In Russia, everything that has to do with culture has always been under the control of the Party and the government.

⁴ Vladimir Vysotsky is a famous actor, songwriter and performer who was often at odds with Soviet authorities for his "anti-Soviet" lyrics. Vysotsky died in 1980.

I could not read what I wanted. I had to get special permissions. If I needed a western magazine for work, I would have to get a written permission at work to borrow it from the library and read it. Can you imagine living in such a country and not run, not save your grandson from the army? I'm happy with everything in the U.S. I do not dwell on details. And I do not miss anything in Russia."

"The most difficult time was in the Soviet Union, before we left. It was difficult for various reasons. Although I worked, I was not appointed to leadership positions for a long time. I experienced discomfort... The last few years were difficult. We made it through these years because we already hoped to emigrate, we had already applied for permission to leave and were waiting. It was a time of waiting."

The most important historical event in Iosif's opinion is the beginning of the perestroika: "Then there was some contact with Europe and America. It somehow calmed down the situation. I personally do not think positively of Gorbachev. I believe that he did everything under duress. He let us go under strong pressure from Reagan.

Reagan helped us leave, not Gorbachev!”

Iosif modestly says that he is not particularly proud of anything, except for when he was younger, he “... did something for Jewish emigration in the U.S.” He worked in a synagogue in the town of Malden, which received Jews from Russia, and helped them settle in a new place.

When asked about what he considers to be the most important thing in his life, Iosif says: “The main thing in my life is that I found the perfect wife. She does not leave me; she shared all my creative impulses and my life’s aspirations. I have a very good daughter and my grandson Evgeny is very good. From the height of my age, 89 years old, my family is the most important to me, and their well-being. I have a great-granddaughter Maya. She is 2,5 years old. I do worry - how will she grow up? Unfortunately, her parents don’t speak Russian with her, but maybe she will understand something when she grows up.”

Iosif still keeps up with news from Russia. He has an iPod and listens to Radio Liberty. What does Iosif think of his

former country now? “I think that today Russia is one of the most horrible places on Earth, because the secret service came to power. Right now in Russia everything is going according to the worst-case scenario. Russia wants to prove to the world that it is a great country just like the USA. But where is the proof? I do not see it. They say: ‘When you have strength, you don’t need intelligence.’ Now they say: ‘We have Putin, we don’t need intelligence.’ Mr. Putin is the worst example of a secret service man. But the Russian people vote ‘yes’ 95% of the time. History teaches them nothing. It is clear that he came out of the KGB circles, and he surrounds himself with people who are his colleagues from the KGB. And the public likes this strong personality: Russia is rising up from its knees... Well, let it rise, but without us.”

And what does Iosif think about socialism and capitalism? “I believe that socialism is a failed theory. It did not survive anywhere. Capitalism is the most stable economic system, although it has its own fallacies. When a positive thing wins and when problems are solved, everything

is great. There is nothing wrong with this economic system, with capitalism or with the USA. Mistakes happen everywhere, but the most important principle is that an individual is free. Free to do whatever he wants – that’s the best thing! That’s the basis of everything.”

Whom does Iosif see as a hero? “In my youth, heroes were prescribed for us. But my friends or I did not consider them heroes. There was this Soviet writer, Nikolai Ostrovsky. He was extremely ill, bed-ridden... And he wrote very poor prose. We were made to read him and to consider him a hero, but I don’t see him as such. I consider Hemmingway a hero. There wasn’t a single intelligentsia house in Russia where there would not be his portrait. He is a fascinating personality.”

Iosif loves Russian literature. One of his favorite authors currently is Vladimir Nabokov because he is “unusually talented: he wrote both prose and verse.” The second place belongs to Alexander Kuprin. Iosif’s second passion is ballet. He also appreciates cinema and loves old school directors such as Grigoriy Chukhrai and his contemporaries who “made honest



Iosif and Idelle, 2015

films about the war.” Iosif also greatly respects Andrei Tarkovsky’s works.

Russian culture holds a very important place in Iosif’s life. He appreciates Russian literature, theater, and cinematography. To know Russian culture for him is to watch films by great Russian directors, such as Alexei German or Grigoriy Chukhrai. Iosif is saddened by the fact that his grandson speaks Russian with a heavy accent and that his great-granddaughter will not have any Russian language because Evgeny and his wife speak only English in their family. ~

Mira Borisovna Krupkina

Recorded by Shahzoda Nasimi

Tears filled Mira's eyes when she was talking about herself. She has endured much pain and overcame many obstacles and losses in her life.

Childhood

This is how Mira describes her family: "I was born in August of 1928 in the wonderful city of Odessa. My family consisted of four people: my mother, father, younger brother, and, of course, myself. My brother was born on January 15, 1932. Our parents graduated from the gymnasium and were educated people, which is why

¹ Kherson is an important port on the Black Sea and the Dnieper River, located in southern Ukraine.

they raised us well and gave us the best education at the time. We grew up in a cultured family. Our parents were fluent in several foreign languages: English, French, and German, but they spoke only Russian to us, although they sometimes spoke German to each other." Mira explains that she is half "Russian" and half Jewish: "My father was Jewish, and my mother was Ukrainian."

Mira's mother was named Gitya. Born in Galicia, she graduated from the gymnasium there and then proceeded to study medicine (it is unknown where she studied). Before the Second World War, her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Mira's father's full name was Boris Rudmanov. Born and raised in Zhytomir, Ukraine, he studied law (it is unknown where exactly) and later worked as a director of a factory. Mira's parents moved to Odessa after the October Revolution because their relatives lived there. Mira discusses her city with deep admiration: "Odessa is an incredible city. It is so green and right on the sea. Being kids in a happy, loving family, my little brother Sasha and I jumped, swam, and ran around by the

² 'Petlurists' is a term used to refer to members of the Ukrainian Army at the time of the Bolshevik-Ukrainian War of 1918-1919, named so after Symon Petlura, the leader of the Ukrainian

Black Sea. In the summers, my mother would send us to vacation in Kherson¹ with my aunt's family. Life before the war was wonderful and carefree."

Mira does not remember her grandparents, but knows that her father's brother was a writer and that he was killed by the Petlurists² during the Russian Civil War.

Mira started school when she was six. She loved to study, was always a straight-A student, and always knew that she would become a doctor. Six years later her plans were interrupted by the start of the Great Patriotic War.

The Great Patriotic War

The Great Patriotic War began when Mira was twelve years old: "A war that took away millions of lives... Unfortunately, the war also affected our family. My

Directorate who was also the head of the Army. Petlurists have been accused of terrible anti-Semitic crimes during this war.



Mira, Czech Republic, 1945

parents and my brother were killed. A German bomb hit our home and turned it to ash.”

This is how Mira described the beginning of the war: “I was playing outside with my friends, when suddenly the radio came on. The radio hung on a tall pole on the street, and when people heard that some news was being broadcasted on the radio, everyone would gather around and listen quietly. But this time the news was horrible. The first thing that was uttered was: ‘Attention, attention, this is Moscow speaking!...’ These words unleashed fear on the people.



Mira with her comrades-in-arms, Czech Republic, 1945

Everyone fell silent, everyone became terrified. And thus began the war. At that time, I was old enough to understand what was happening. I was afraid.”

Mira calls herself “the daughter of the war.” She does not like to talk about her childhood, because remembering it is too difficult to bear. At 12 years of age she was completely orphaned and had to become independent. Telling her stories, she often strays away from the topic, gets confused in the chronological sequence of events, and this makes her story even more terrifying. Mira claims that she is telling this story for the first time. We recorded her story as it was told.

“There are frightening things that are hard to endure even at an older age. The Germans took everyone, did not spare anyone, neither the young nor the old... My mother, brother, and I were taken with everyone else. Mama managed to make a deal with a German soldier, or most likely a Romanian, since she spoke German. He agreed to let us go, but Mama said that only one of us would go because the three of us would never survive together. She decided that I should be the one to leave. You see I was next to that fire and was saved by a miracle. I never saw my mother or brother again. They were burned together with many others in that ammunition depot. My brother was nine. He played the violin. He was a good boy. I never wanted to recall this episode of

my life. I am telling you about this for the first time. I was completely alone, I had no one. My father died on the battlefield. And our home burned to the ground from a German bomb, so I was left with nothing.”

“Generally, strong people are able to survive. I was lucky, as I was a brave girl. I never looked like a stereotypical Jewish girl. I was always nicely dressed: a nice coat, a pretty hat. For this reason I was not detained. I walked four blocks and found my aunt, my father’s sister. I had to eat frozen potatoes and rye bread. There were times when even that did not exist. Then the police came and took my aunt and me. The policemen were Ukrainian. My aunt was a good housewife. She was assigned to the kitchen through some connections she had and she told me to serve the food.”

“I had relatives in Slobodka, a region of Odessa. I accidentally found their house and stayed with them for a few days. I left because I was afraid. I was still young, but I knew that if I stayed with them, I would be killed one day. When I heard that the Germans were checking the houses for Jews, I stuffed a piece of lard and bread in my pocket and decided to run away.”

It is unclear how Mira lived through the

three years of German occupation. The only thing that is clear is that she lived with never-ending hunger and constant fear for her life, and witnessed the death of her loved ones, as well as strangers. When Odessa was liberated and the Red Army entered the city, Mira decided to go fight on the frontlines. At the time she was 14,5 years old. Here is how she talks about this experience: “When the Russians came, I decided that since I have no one to live for, then I will go to the front. I survived, but I had no parents, no home, nothing. I was completely alone in the whole world. The second reason was my love for the Motherland. I stopped some truck on the road and asked the captain to take me with him. I was a smart girl. I did everything as I was told: I kept a logbook, helped out at the pharmacy, fed the wounded, gave them water. Not a nurse, just an assistant. I was at a field hospital. The frontline. I was on the front till the end of the war.” Besides that, since Mira knew German very well and could speak Romanian, she helped with translations.

Mira shares with us some memories from her life on the frontlines: for example, she began working at the field hospital near the city of Komrat in Moldova; there were downpours in Hungary when they

fought there, and 1944 was a difficult year. Most of all, she remembers the heavy fighting of the Red Army, especially in Hungary, near the Tisza River, where many people were killed.

It is interesting that Mira accurately remembers the number of her unit: she fought in the Second Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal Malinovsky in the 22nd Infantry Division of the 51st Corps. She was officially enrolled in the active duty and had a military ID.

According to Mira's recounts, her division spent four weeks in Hungary, and then moved on to Transylvania, to the city of Zlin. Mira remembers seeing many wounded in that city. Then, the division crossed the Carpathians, the most dangerous mountainous zone of Europe, on horseback. This is Mira's commentary on this experience: "How could I, a girl, not be afraid of anything?! I even rode on horseback. I remember a situation when we were riding on horseback along the earthquake-prone Carpathian Mountains, descending from the top, and down below was heavy fire from the Germans. I was laying on the ground thinking that time would pass, years would pass, and I would have a family and friends, and I imagined

how I would be telling them all about what I had endured and how I participated in the war. After a week we joined with the Red Army forces in Krakow and Katowice in Poland. In 2013, my family and I travelled to Poland, and I remembered those times of war."

Mira celebrated Victory Day in Czechoslovakia, in the city Nova Ves: "The war ended for everyone on May 9, but for us it ended on May 8. Rumors that the war will end soon travelled around in the Ukrainian Front, and so 'Hitler kaput!' was announced on the radio. Hitler turned his people into animals. They did not care whom to kill: children, women, the elderly... And now the end has come for them. I saw how Russian soldiers gave bread to German children and the elderly. I never wanted to kill."



After the victory, Mira decided to return to Odessa. She hoped that maybe her



At the graduation from the dentist vocational school

father was still alive. Upon her arrival in Odessa, she found out that her father was killed on the frontlines, but fortunately she was able to find her aunt and live with her for some time, as Mira did not have a home of her own. Because of the war, Mira did not have a secondary education diploma although she was of age. She returned to the seventh grade determined to become a doctor. She finished school by testing out of the graduation requirements. At the age of 17, she got accepted to a dentist vocational school in Odessa. After successfully finishing four years of studies at the school, Mira began to work as a dentist in a small settlement called Lyubashovka of the Odessa region: "This was a large railroad station and

next to that was a beautiful, green village. Working there was interesting."

It was there, in Lyubashovka, that Mira met her future husband. Here is her account of this episode: "This is an interesting story. In Lyubashovka I had my own dental office, where I treated patients. One day a Gypsy woman came into my office — I pulled out a bad tooth for her. She was very grateful and wanted to tell me my fortune. I did not want to, but she still told me that the first person who walks into my office would become my husband. I answered her that she made a mistake, that I am already seeing someone, and that he is currently far away, in Odessa. And so at that moment a patient entered. He was on his way somewhere by train and his cheek got swollen. So he stopped by my clinic, and I treated him. When I left the office, he was waiting for me outside and invited me to a restaurant. He was smart and very persistent. He came every evening from Odessa to see me. We got married very

quickly, after three weeks of dating, and lived together for 30 years. After that you cannot even be sure whether you should believe Gypsies or not...”

Mira’s husband was born in Nikolaev near Odessa and studied in Kharkov, where he finished law school. He was 11 years older than Mira. During the war, he worked as a prosecutor in the Navy, and after the war he came to Odessa, where he also worked as a prosecutor. Everyone knew him in Odessa, according to Mira.

A year later a daughter was born in the family who was named Galina. Mira tells that she really wanted to have a child because she was lonely, but she could have never allowed herself to have another child, because she “did not have anyone who could have supported me.” Her daughter got married differently. Mira arranged a big wedding for her so it would be unlike the wedding that Mira herself had.

Mira recounts that there were training benefits for veterans after the war: one

could get accepted into an institute without entrance exams if one had a vocational school diploma. So in 1960 Mira was accepted into Kiev Medical Institute, where she studied for four years.

Mira believes that she was treated well in the USSR: “I was given an apartment, people always gave me gifts, since I was a war veteran...”, and she is hurt that veterans receive so little attention in the U.S.

Emigration

In 1978, Mira’s family emigrated from the USSR – first to Israel and later to the



Among the Israeli soldiers

U.S. At this point, Mira’s daughter was already married and had a son, Zhenia. Mira describes her son-in-law to be “a sensible person with good hands,” and her grandson Zhenia as “a handsome man, blond with blue eyes.” Mira says with pride that her grandson defended his dissertation on the topic of tuberculosis in prisons. Now Mira has two great-grandchildren – twins, Nick and Maddie.

Mira on Jewishness, Life, and Education

On Jewishness: Mira believes that Jews have always had a hard life. She did not want her grandson to feel Jewish: “Here we have a common nationality, and this means a lot to me. Whatever happens, the Jews are always blamed. My daughter is curious [about Judaism], but I do not want to have anything with it. I do not wish to speak about Jewry; I don’t want to say that I am so miserable... Although I always

help Jews...”

On Life: “Life is hard... I endured difficulties throughout my entire life, I did not have any moral support, because I did not have the most dear thing that a person can have – parents...”

On Education: “One must learn! Always!”



Mira and Shahzoda, 2015

Naum Grigorievich Hayut

Recorded by Alena Gomulna

Childhood in a Romanian shtetl

Naum Grigorievich Hayut was born in Moldova in a Jewish shtetl called Ryshkany, which is located near the city of Bel'tsy¹, on January 1, 1922. This territory was called Bessarabia at the time and was part of Romania from 1918 to 1939. Naum recalls that Ryshkany was inhabited only by Jewish families, and all of them had many children. Naum's family had seven children, and his wife's parents had ten. The city was home to nine synagogues and a free Jewish school Talmud-Torah, where classes were conducted in Yiddish. There were

¹ According to the Romanian census of 1930, out of 35,000 people there were about 20,000 Jews, 10,000 Romanians (Moldovans), and 5,000 Ukrainians and Russians.

also several textile factories and tailoring shops. People from neighboring Moldovan villages came to Ryshkany to buy materials from the factory shops and then placed orders with the local tailors. According to Naum, there was a tailor in almost every family. The city was divided into districts by synagogue types: some for the rich, some for the middle class, and some for the lower class. Naum's father was a member

of the Portniazhnaya synagogue (Tailors' Synagogue), but Naum did not say whether this was a rich, middle-class, or lower-class synagogue.

Naum's father was named Gershen (Gregory). Born in 1887, he was a tailor with his own shop. Naum's mother was born in 1892 and was named Leikhi (Leah). All of Gershen and Leikhi's sons became tailors. First, they worked with

their father in his shop, and later they opened their own shops. The oldest brother's name was Nusen (born in 1912), the second brother was named Mendel (born in 1913), Avrom was born in 1915, then Berl' (Boris) - in 1920, Naum - in 1922, Rivn (Roven) - in 1923, and finally in 1925, a girl was born into the family who was



Naum and his wife



The photograph shows a family of twenty-five people: Naum's parents and their children – one daughter and six sons, and eleven grandchildren (four girls and five boys). Naum is thirty-five in this picture. Now all of his brothers and sisters have passed away, and the grandchildren live in different regions of Israel since 1990.

named Bella.

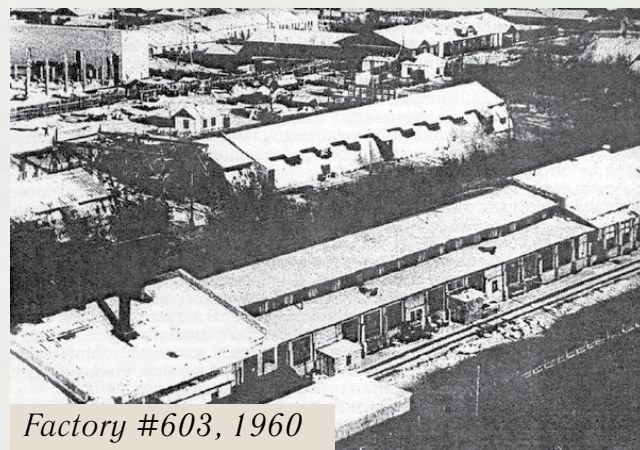
Naum's family celebrated all Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, Shavuot, and others. Naum had a Bar Mitzvah. He studied at a cheder, where a blind Rabbi Itzhak taught him Yiddish (children always poked fun at him). As a child, Naum loved to run track. After graduating from the cheder, Naum studied at a Romanian school. He finished the seven-year program there with straight A's. His favorite subject was Romanian. In total, Naum knows five languages: Moldavian/Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Hebrew.

After graduating from school, Naum worked at his father's shop. In reality, the shop was not a separate building, but rather in the front room of their house which was equipped with two huge sewing machines and a large table. The living room was in the middle of the house, followed by the bedroom and the kitchen. The house had a little backyard, where the outhouse stood.

Naum says that before WW II, his sister Bella, his brothers Roven and Boris, and Naum himself were still living with their parents. The rest of the brothers were already married and lived elsewhere. They were all tailors, and everyone had his own

shop. A tragedy occurred with the brother Mendel before the war. He tried to cross the border into the USSR in 1938 (when he was 25 years old), but the Soviets thought he was a spy and executed him.

Naum recalls that many Jews from Ryshkany left their homes to permanently settle in Palestine before the Second World War. Especially young people ages 18-20 were eager to emigrate. An organization called "Gordonia"² was particularly active in Ryshkany in preparing people for resettling in Israel: they offered special Hebrew courses, trained people for work in kibbutzim, educated them about Israel, and raised halutzim. Naum belonged to this organization, i.e. he was a Gordonist. He learned Hebrew there and wanted to emigrate to Israel when he was 19, but his plans were cut short by the outbreak of WWII.



Factory #603, 1960

² This was a Zionist youth movement that emerged at the end of 1923 in Galicia and spread over most of the Jewish world. The objectives of the movement consisted of the reconstruction of Jewish homeland in Eretz-Israel, the creation of a working nation, the revival of Jewish culture in the Hebrew language, and humanistic education of its followers. The movement sought to bring into its ranks young people from all strata of Jewish society.

The Great Patriotic War

The Soviet government in Moldova existed for only a year before the Nazis invaded. Naum tells the story of how his family was evacuated to the Urals on July 7, 1940; however, he does not explain why the evacuation (or resettlement) occurred. He and his family were settled in a village called Vvedenskoye, 12 km from the city of Kurgan, the location of state armament factory No. 603³. Naum worked in this military facility for five years, first as a mechanic and then as a foreman. He had an occupational deferment for the duration of the war and, therefore, was not drafted (out of the entire family, only Roven fought at the front). The factory produced capsular sleeves for No. 8 shells. Seventy women worked in Naum's department, and he was the only man in the group. Naum learned Russian while working in the Ural region.

When Naum was 21, his father introduced him to a girl named Yana, (or Jochevit, or Yachet). She was five years

³ Plant No. 603 8th Main Directorate of the USSR People's Commissariat of ammunition produced capsule sleeve KV-4, the primer for the 30-mm to 100-mm caliber guns, and an anti-aircraft cannon during the Great Patriotic War; in 1942-1943 it

older than Naum. They got married in the city hall on February 17, 1943, and have lived a life together. Their marriage lasted 65 years - from 1943 to 2008 until Yana's death at the age of 90.

In the same year (1943), Yana and Naum had a daughter, Alexandra. Since then only girls were born in the family: Alexandra has a daughter Liudmila, who also has two girls, 13 and 10 years of age. Naum's daughter is a professional musician who played the violin for 22 years. After the emigration, she worked as an administrative manager in the U.S. Embassy of Israel. In the U.S., Alexandra quit music for good and became a manager in a hotel where she worked for 20 years.

Life after the War

After the war, in 1947, Naum's family returned to Moldova (former Bessarabia), but did not find their house: "there was only flattened out soil there." They decided to move to Chernovtsy, Ukraine (a

produced grenades RGD-33 and RGD-42. 1008 people were awarded the "Valiant Labor in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945" medal.



Beltsy after heaving fighting in 1941

historical center of Bukovina) and lived there for 25 years until they emigrated. At the time, many Jews from small

shtetls in Moldova resettled in Chernovtsy, because the city was not completely destroyed during the war whereas those shtetls were erased from the face of the earth. Naum recounts that the city had six synagogues and chapels, as well as a Jewish theater named after Shalom-Aleikhem. However, in 1949 the theater and some of the synagogues were closed on the orders of the Soviet authorities. The remaining synagogues and chapels remained open: "Jews were holding their ground!"

Naum, along with his wife and daughter, lived on Pervomayskaya Street (May 1st Street). He went back to tailoring, then for 25 years worked as a teacher of his craft at the city's vocational school. He was awarded the title "Honored Worker of Vocational Training" for his merits. Naum learned Ukrainian in Chernovtsy, because "this was Western Ukraine, and everyone spoke Ukrainian there."

Emigration

In 1972, Naum, his wife, daughter, and granddaughter moved to Israel. The reason for emigration was that fact that they were Jews, as Naum puts it. Permission to leave was difficult to obtain, and people waited a long time to receive it. Naum says that they had to leave everything behind in Ukraine, but in Israel they were accepted with "open arms" and were given an apartment in the Kiryat-Nordau district in Netanya. The city had a sewing and knitting factory, and Naum went to work as a cutter there. Yana did not work in Israel. During his 17 years of living in Israel, Naum learned to speak Hebrew very well.

His daughter and her husband (an electrical engineer) moved to America and after 8 years were able to bring Naum and Bella to the U.S. They arrived in Boston in 1989. At first, they rented an apartment. Later, they received subsidized housing

in Brighton (Washington Street, 30). By now, Naum has lived 42 years outside of the USSR and tries to forget "Russia." He is not interested in news from Russia and instead likes listening to news from Israel. He does not like it when Soviet songs are played, because even "in my youth I did not like the USSR, because they abused people."



Naum does not know too much about the American way of life, because he "did not experience it." It is probably because of this lack of immersion that he never learned to speak English, contrary to his previous experiences when he would quickly learn the language of the place he lived in.

When Yana became ill, life got very difficult. She was ill for only two months until she passed away in 2008. After his wife's death, three home attendants would come to Naum's apartment to help, but

living alone was becoming harder and harder, and finally Naum was brought to the HRC.

Life and Music

Not having a musical education, Naum, nevertheless, always loved to sing. He performed at community festivals in Israel, where he sang solo pieces, and in the Russian-speaking community choir in Boston, where he was the soloist for 12 years and he received honorable mention every year. With his choir Naum even sang for the mayor of Boston. Naum considers his time with the choir to be the happiest, brightest moments of his life. "I loved people and respected people, loved the Jewish society, and we had a group in the house that celebrated all Jewish holidays: Passover, New Year's... 100 people would come to the concerts!"

According to Naum, the most important thing in life is life itself.



Raisa Samoylovna Chigrinskaya

This life story was recorded by Yan Shneyderman is it was told by Raisa

Childhood

I was born on June 30, 1921, in southern Russia in a city called Rostov-on-Don. This was an industrial city: there was a very good shoe factory, the famous factory Rostselmash¹, a pedagogical institute, other universities...

We had a fenced yard, where all the children played. The Civil War had just ended then, and we played the game of “the Reds and the Whites.” One little boy hit me in the kidney with a stick, which later caused stones to form in that

¹ Rostselmash, a syllabic abbreviation of the Russian phrase ‘the Rostov factory for agricultural machines’. Founded in 1929 as a government contractor, the factory produces a variety of

kidney. My father adored me, and when the kidney stones had to be removed, he said, “I will not hand my daughter over to the butchers!” But I had to get my entire kidney removed in 1936.

Everyone played together in our yard, kids of shoemakers and engineers, and we stayed friends for the rest of our lives. Everyone walked around in ripped clothing, everyone was poor, but we were rich in spirit. Everyone loved one another, helped one another, sympathized with one another... Our school never experienced any ethnic conflicts of any kind. My best friends were a German, a Polish, a Ukrainian, and a Jew. My friend of 66 years has just passed away...

We were a poor Jewish family; our parents were middle-aged. There were five children in the family: I have four sisters and one brother. I was the oldest in the family. My parents did not speak perfect Russian. They immigrated to Russia after the First World War, perhaps from Poland. My parents spoke Yiddish and broken Russian. Once, Mama asked a neighbor for a “thief,” although what she needed was a rope (a mistake of pronunciation).

In those days, Rostov had a synagogue, where we took matzah for Passover. My mother usually fasted for Yom Kippur. I

products for state farms. In 1931, the first Stalinets-1 harvesting machines were produced, which received the highest award (Grand Prix diploma) during the World Industrial Exhibition in Paris in 1937.



Raisa in the 1940s

remember that once as a little girl, I went to the synagogue with my mother for Rosh Hashanah. Everyone cried there, praying to God, and Mama cried as well. I got scared and asked her, “Mommy, why are you crying, who hurt you?”

I learned about many things from my father. He told me a lot about what is written in the Bible: the history of Joseph, what Hanukah is... This was the reason I knew much more [about Judaism and religion] than others.



Raisa in the 1940s

Mama and Papa spoke Yiddish only when they did not want the children to understand what is going on, but I had a talent for learning languages and I remembered everything. When I was already in America, I went to a lecture dedicated to Solomon Mikhoels², whose works were read in Yiddish, and I was amazed that I could understand what was being discussed. I cannot speak Yiddish, but I do understand a little bit; I know popular expressions and shtetl songs, such as *Oyfn pripetchek*.”

The Great Patriotic War

“In 1939, I was accepted into the department of Russian language and literature at the Rostov Pedagogical Institute. I finished two years, and in June the war began. In 1941, I was 19 years old. I was just an immature girl, knew nothing of life because Mama always protected me, afraid to damage my second kidney. We had a brother who went to war (volunteered to go fight), but he

told us that he was travelling to Sochi so Mama and I would not worry. “If you need something, just send a request to the main post office in Sochi” – that is all he said. We believed it. In October 1941, my family evacuated from Rostov, which happened exactly when the Germans were supposed to take Moscow. I was accompanied by my elderly parents and my younger sister.

The last steamboat with evacuees was leaving the city, but it was impossible to



Raisa's brother Leonid

² Mikhoels was a Soviet Jewish actor and the artistic director of the Moscow State Jewish Theater. He served as the chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee during WWII. As Stalin pursued an increasingly anti-Semitic line after the War, Mikhoels' position as a leader of the Jewish community led to increasing persecution from the Soviet state. In 1948, Mikhoels was murdered.

get on it. People were hanging off the sides of the boat; it was impossible to see the deck. When one looks at such horrors as an outsider, one sympathizes with people, feels sorry for them, but we can never imagine that the same thing could happen to us. During the war, documents were more precious than life. We were given papers, which stated that we were the family of a serviceman (we already knew by that time that my brother volunteered to fight). With these papers we were supposed to get passes to board the steamboat. When we arrived at the wharf, I saw men and women who slept on the floor awaiting their turn to petition the Port's Director to get tickets to Kazan. I walked the entire night among people lying on the floor, but could not find the Director. Then, I decided to send a telegram to Sochi just in case [my brother could help] and, after not receiving any response, got in line with everybody else.

As I was standing in line, some soldier was passing by. When he saw us, he came up to me and struck up a conversation. He then offered, “Let's step away?”, so I went with him. He said that he could help get us evacuation tickets when he is applying for his pass. I gave him my

papers and stood to the side while he approached the ticket window. After some time the window closed, he came up to us and said, “Done.” I thought that we were done, that we did not receive our tickets, and I thought that I would go insane. And while all these thoughts raced in my head, he said, “Here are your documents!” We agreed to meet on the riverbank at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 I arrived at the appointed meeting place, but did not see him. There was some lad standing there, but it turned out to be him – he was a completely different person! It was there, on the banks of the Volga river, under the moonlight that a romantic rendezvous of two people who fell in love during the wartime took place...

Getting onto the steamboat was virtually impossible, but he somehow brought us to our cabin. The guard did not want to open the cabin prior to the departure, but my new friend said, “You will open the cabin so that I can see it's done.” To thank him for all his help, my mother gave him our most prized possession: a jar of jam. He asked me for my photograph, but I did not have one on me where I'd be photographed by myself. He wanted to say farewell, but I was so exhausted that I fell on the bed and could not get up to walk him out. My sister was



Raisa in the 1940s

ready to kill me, but I could not get up. It was horrible; I remember this feeling like it was yesterday. We said goodbye and he gave me his address. I wanted to find him to thank him, but

was afraid that I would do him harm, and that is how this story ended. He saved our family!

We stayed in Kazan³ for about half a year. My sister went to work as a secretary in the Academy of Sciences, and I worked there as a night watchman. Then in the summer of 1941, we moved to the city of Stalinabad in Tadzhikistan, and in 1949 we returned to Rostov. When we came back to our city, we saw our yard destroyed and learned that during the war, a Jewish family living in our house was executed by the Germans.

My brother and future husband fought on the frontlines. After the war, my brother worked for the Georgian newspaper “Dawn of the East.” He told us how wonderful the Georgian people were, and how friendly they were toward other nationalities, including Jews.”

³Present-day Dushanbe, the capital of Tadzhikistan

Husband

“My husband was born in the city of Kremenchuk in Ukraine, but was still a child when he moved to Rostov. At the very beginning of the war, he was a student, but volunteered to fight at the frontlines, leaving behind his single mother. He was an artilleryman. In one particularly deadly battle, he drew the enemy’s fire upon himself, thus saving his fellow soldiers. He was awarded the Medal of Glory for his bravery. In this battle, my husband lost three fingers on his right hand and one on his left. When he was being operated on, the doctors wanted to remove all the fingers, explaining that otherwise gangrene would spread, but my husband, struggling not to faint, demanded that they leave the remaining fingers. “Because,” he said, “I will still be a scientist and I will need to write.” He stayed in the hospital for several months and had excruciating

pain, which no medications could alleviate. My husband was a strong and courageous person until the end of his life.”

Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in the USSR

Both Raisa and her husband experienced manifestations of governmental and domestic anti-Semitism several times throughout their lives.

Anti-Semitism in Raisa’s husband’s life: “After the war my husband would not be accepted into graduate school for the very reason that he was a Jew. During the entrance exams, he was asked very difficult questions; the goal was to make him fail. He answered everything perfectly, but still received a poor grade. My husband could not find work in his profession, so he worked as a librarian’s assistant at an engineering institute. Eventually, he became a lecturer in this institute. Meanwhile, Yuri Zhdanov⁴ was transferred from Moscow to Rostov and was appointed

⁴Yuri Andreevich Zhdanov was a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, a prominent chemist and rector of the University of

the Rector of the Rostov State University. The very professor who gave my husband a failing grade for his entrance exam to graduate school came to Zhdanov and told him that he cannot live with his guilt because he gave my husband, a man of encyclopedic knowledge, a failing grade. The professor made a request to Zhdanov to transfer my husband to the university, and Zhdanov agreed to his request. I advised my husband not to transfer, but Zhdanov knew that we were in desperate need to improve our living situation, so he offered us an apartment. At the time, we lived together with my husband’s mother in a small apartment, in which one room served as both my husband’s office and his mother’s bedroom. Zhdanov promised to give us an apartment in the center of Rostov across from the university, so that there would be space for my husband’s mother and for us. My husband knew Zhdanov fairly well and described him as a remarkably educated person.”

Anti-Semitism in Raisa’s life: “When I was sent to work in Morozovsk after the university (following the Soviet job allotment system), I could not find any

Rostov. He was married to Stalin’s daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva from 1949-1952 and had one daughter with her. His father was a prominent Soviet politician who was close to Joseph Stalin.

place to live. I moved from one place to another on a weekly basis. When I inquired about a room for rent, everyone would say, "Oh, what a good person you are!" But when I needed to get their permission to put their address as my permanent residence, they would notice the fifth column⁵ in my passport, and it would all of a sudden turn out that the room was needed for their visiting relatives or something like this.

My nationality was the reason I was not hired on several occasions. Once in the 1950s, I heard that a teacher's position became available in one of Rostov's colleges, so I came to their offices late in the evening to apply. The head of the HR office was already closing her door with her back to me. I told her that I heard that the college was looking for an English teacher. She got really excited and invited me into her office. She asked me "Do you know of anyone who could teach Russian?" And I said that I have a degree in teaching Russian. She exclaimed, "Well, God himself sent you to us!" She invited me to come to the college early next morning before classes to meet with the director.

I realized that this woman forgot to

check my passport because she was so excited. When I came with my husband to the college the next morning, the director told me, "We do not have any vacancies right now. Who told you that we have vacancies?" I knew that they realized that I am Jewish. I laughed and responded, "You are the only organization in the Soviet Union that hires people at night. I came yesterday at the close of business and you had one vacancy. Today I came back before you opened, and the position is already taken!"

Once, I met a woman on a steamboat on my way to a resort near Rostov. We quickly became friends and she offered to share a cabin with her. We were talking and she started telling me about her boss: "I have a boss named Abram (she did not pronounce the letter 'r' correctly on purpose in order to mimic a Jewish accent). Actually, he treats me very well, but he is an Abram!" And so I told her that in that case if I were walking on one side of the street, she would have to cross over to the other side. "Can you imagine, how awful it is - you fell in love with a Jew!"

The situation was terrible during the "Doctors' Plot." Many people believed that Jews actually poisoned Party

members, but I personally was never treated poorly. I remember people saying: "I do not like Jews, but you are a good person."



"I finished the first two years of study at the Russian literature department in Rostov, and the third and fourth years in Stalinabad. In 1944, I went for another degree at the same Institute in Stalinabad. This time I applied for the department of foreign languages. I finished the third and fourth years of the foreign languages study in Rostov. I was a good student and was expected to graduate with honors. However, in the 1940s the anti-Semitic sentiments were such that to receive honors would be highly problematic for a Jew. The head of the student affairs department at the Institute was friends with my mother's friend. In one conversation, when they were discussing

me and my diploma with honors, this woman said, "She will not get the honors. She will have one B." And I got a B in political economics. Back then that was considered to be awful, but now I think this gives me credit. I have outstanding marks for 62 courses and only one B in this one subject.

I loved being a teacher! I was born with the gift for teaching. I started my professional life in Tadzhikistan: I taught Russian to graduate students. I spoke Russian to them regardless of the topic, because if you just teach theory, a person will not learn to speak or understand. When my father passed away in 1949, and we decided to return to Rostov, the graduate students wanted me to stay so much that the administration offered to increase my salary two-fold and to give me an apartment in Stalinabad to keep me there.

Upon our return to Rostov, I was sent to teach in a Cossack village of Morozovsk, in the Rostov region. After Morozovsk, on the advice of one acquaintance I moved to Shakhty, a mining town. There, I rented an apartment from an elderly woman who lived with her granddaughter, grandson,

⁵In Soviet passports, a person's nationality (or ethnic background) was mandatorily marked on the fifth line of the biographical information page.



Raisa and her sister Fira

and great-granddaughter. The father of the children was an agronomist. He was forced to work for the Germans during the war. Because of this, he was accused of collaborating with the Nazis and was sentenced to hard labor by the Soviets. His wife could not find job anywhere because of her husband's sentence, and finally she had to take a job to get to which she had to cross a ravine, and there were wolves in the ravine! When Stalin died,

this family rejoiced, but my mother and I wept.

After Shakhty, I taught at an evening school for the working youth in Rostov. Once, my teaching was observed by an education specialist from the school district. One of the students was late, but he apologized and explained his reason for being late in English so well, that the education specialist exclaimed: "No one speaks English so well in any day school!" English in my school was an elective, but my classes were always full. Once, the power went out in school and everyone was released early. I, along with the other teachers, was waiting in the faculty lounge with my colleagues for the power to come back on. Suddenly, we heard a knock on the door: "Raisa Samoylovna, we have been waiting for you for 45 minutes already!" They were sitting in the class in the dark waiting for me! No one left! These were very motivated young people. It's a stereotype that some disinterested working class savages were attending evening schools. It was very interesting for me to work with them. I do not even know who learned from whom: they from me or I from them."

Amateur Theater

"When I studied in Rostov, I frequently participated in performances organized by the Soviet public education campaign (called Propaganda brigades) in the Rostov region. I performed and read poems my entire life. At 12 years of age, I recited Marshak's poem "Mister Twister" and earned a prize: a trip to Moscow. I began to perform before I started to work. When I was still in school, in 1937, it was 100 years since the death of Pushkin, the great Russian poet. All cities in the Soviet Union were staging Pushkin's plays. I really wanted to get the role of Marina Mnishek in his "Boris Godunov." There were four other girls auditioning for this part. I was very nervous; I shook like an aspen leaf. I was the last one to audition, and when I looked at the girl sitting next to me, I froze: a stately, beautiful, legitimate Marina Mnishek! And I decided that I would not get the role and calmed down.

⁶The generic name False Dmitry (also Pseudo-Demetrius) refers to various pretenders to the Russian throne during the Time of Troubles (1598-1613) who passed themselves off as

For this reason, when they called me up to read, I was not nervous. I read the way I was supposed to read, and they chose me!

Rehearsals started. In "The Scene Next to the Fountain," after Marina says that she will not listen to False Dmitry's⁶ declarations of love until he takes Godunov's throne, she is supposed to leave. Every rehearsal the stage director asked me to show how I would exit, but every time I would say that I would do it



Raisa in the 1940s

Tsarevich Dmitry Ivanovich of Russia, the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible, after the real Dmitry's death at the age of eight in 1591.

when the time comes, and did not even once rehearse my exit from the stage. During the performance, instead of leaving with my head held high, I left like a sulky goose, and the audience started to laugh. I thought that I had ruined everything, but the director came up to me backstage and said, “Dear Raisa, I congratulate you with your first success! You will be a wonderful actress!” I believed neither my eyes nor my ears. These were not just words. The next day, he came to our house and told us that a new young actors’ studio was opening at the Rostov Theatre, and that they were offering me and another boy admission. But my mother did not let me go there, because she thought that theater is not a profession. I am very grateful to her for this. I am glad that I ultimately became a teacher.

I love poems very much. When I go for walks, I read poems to myself and enjoy it. Have you ever heard these verses?

Oh God! — I scream with all the depth of pain. —

What is immortality to me but a suspicious paradise!

Let me die, but not later than my beloved —

Do not punish me with this punishment!

That’s Yevtushenko. I deeply respect him.”



“I could not even presume that someday I would go to America. At the end of the 1980s, one of my sisters and my friend believed that those who go to America are psychologically abnormal people. When I was leaving for America in 1993, the same friend confessed to me, “We were the ones



Raisa and Fira

who were psychologically abnormal.” And I like America very much as well.



“Once in Shakhty, I woke up and saw a stranger sitting next to me on the couch, and next to him was Kolya, the grandson of my landlady. Kolya says, “This is my father.” I sprang up to let this man sit comfortably. And he said the following to me, “You do not need to pay me any attention. As if I am not here!” And that’s when I realized how a person can be killed in a person, and what can be done to a person when he becomes dependent. For me the biggest sin is to abuse the trust of another human being.

If I had children, I would first teach them self-respect. Before, we were taught to be modest, and I did not understand what it meant to love myself at all. It is necessary to explain to children that they need to appreciate their own good qualities...



Raisa, 2015

It seems to me that people who are ungrateful are not trust-worthy. For me, the most important value is integrity. A trust-worthy person will not betray and will not do harm to others. For one of my friends here the most important quality in a person is kindness, but I believe that a trust-worthy person cannot even be unkind.”



Zoya Grigorievna Ofengeym

Recorded by David Eydus in the first person as the story was told by Zoya

Parents

My father's name was Grigoriy Isaakovich Levin. He was born in Lithuania in 1884. At that time there was a so-called "five-percent rule," which meant that colleges and high schools could have only 5% of Jews among the students, and these Jewish boys had to be excellent students. My father entered the St. Petersburg Institute of Technology in 1904, but a year later, in 1905, he was expelled. At that time, students protested the tsarist regime and organized demonstrations. My



Zoya, 1947

father was arrested and exiled to Siberia somewhere past Irkutsk. He worked in the mines¹ up until the Revolution. When the Revolution began, he was released. My father's parents, Isaac and Frieda, stayed in Lithuania and moved to St. Petersburg later, after the Revolution, I can't say exactly which year. His family: father, mother, sister, and brother - all moved from Lithuania to Leningrad. My father's parents, my grandfather and grandmother, spoke to each other in Yiddish and in accented Russian. I think my grandfather also spoke Lithuanian, but I am not certain. My father's parents observed Jewish traditions.

My mother's name was Rakhil Zelikovna (Zakharovna) Mikhalevich. She was born in 1894 in the village of Oëk, in the Irkutsk oblast on the shores of Lake Baikal. Her parents and grandfather were from Poland. There were unrests there too, and they either escaped or were exiled, I am not certain. I think they were exiled, served their time and just stayed there. That was during the reign of Alexander the Second in the 19th century. In the village where they settled, there was only

¹ The usual state punishment was a sentence to do hard labor. The hardest labor was in the mines.

one Jewish family. There was no Jewish community. My mother's family upheld the Jewish traditions, but my mother only spoke Russian. Her parents could not send their children to school - it was too expensive, far from the village, and they all had to work. There were seven children in the family: five sisters and two brothers. They all started working very early in life. They were still children when they had to go into the fields, plant potatoes, and tend to the cattle.

My mother's father, Zelik, was a butcher. He purchased livestock (cows, bulls, deer) and scored them for meat. The village where they lived stood on a route which under the tsarist rule was used for marching convicts to their place of imprisonment. They went on foot, I do not know how many thousands of



Zelik Mikhalevich
and his brother

kilometers. People were chained in pairs. They had to cover a certain distance before they were allowed to take a break, and my grandparents' village was one of the stops. My grandmother, my mother's mother, baked bread and sold the bread to convicts. The family had a boarding house. In their house, convicts slept on the floor and were fed the bread and meat that my grandparents prepared.

In the village of Oëk there were some Russians, but for the most part, it was settled by the indigenous peoples of that region. My mother had a lot of Evenki and Yakut friends. The climate was very tough; it was very cold. It could get to minus 50 degrees C² in this place. Sometimes the blizzards were such that it was impossible to go outside. A rope would be strung from one house to the next; and we had to hold on to this rope in order to go from house to house. When they say "storm" here, I do not pay attention to it. There the wind would knock you over, it was impossible to breathe. It's a cruel climate. I lived there during the war, when we were evacuated there. When you are outside, saliva instantly turns to ice.

²At minus 40 the two scales – Fahrenheit and Celsius- meet.

After the Revolution, the Civil War began. By that time, my mother was living in Irkutsk. She had already finished some professional training courses and worked as a typist. She completed only four classes in the village school taught by a Russian priest, but she wrote very well. When my sons were school students, they would ask me to check their essays, and I would tell them: "Ask Grandma, she will check everything better than me." She was very capable and very well-read. During the Civil War, my mother worked in the Red Army headquarters as a typist. My father also moved to Irkutsk after being released. He became a watchmaker. Some of their friends introduced my father and mother to each other. They were married in 1924, and I was born in 1926."

Relocation to Leningrad

Zoya's father was exiled from St. Petersburg, and after the Revolution he

decided to return to his favorite city. By that time, his parents had already moved to Leningrad from Lithuania. Zoya's father went there in the beginning of 1926, and then her mother came to join him with little Zoya in 1927. In 1929 another daughter was born into the family. She was named Rita. Mother's parents and all her brothers and sisters remained in Siberia. Zoya's father went to work as a factory foreman, while her mother worked in a grocery store as a cashier: "My family was simple and hardworking..."

Stalinist Repressions

"The first time my parents were arrested, we were very young: I was about 5 years old, and my sister was 3 years old. It was 1930, maybe 1932. We had a nanny named Olga. They wanted to send us to an orphanage, but our nanny didn't let them. She stayed with us. First they released

my mother (she was detained for a short time, maybe a month), but my father was in prison a long time. Later he was also released. We hid the fact that he had been arrested.

I don't know what my parents were arrested for. They did not want to talk about it. When I was 11 years old, and my sister was 8, my father was arrested the second time. We never saw him again. We were told that he died in 1938 of a heart attack, a year after he was arrested.

My mother had to raise two young children by herself. She had no profession, so she worked simple jobs to feed us: a cashier in a store, a secretary/typist, sometimes as a maid. To make life easier, we did not tell anyone anything about our father's arrest, and no one knew. My mother was very clever, and she somehow managed to hide everything, and we just told people that our father had died of angina. Only the people closest to us knew that he had been arrested. Therefore, his arrest had no effect on my friendships with other children. I loved other children; my friends and teachers did not know anything. Maybe this was a

bit unusual compared to others, but this is how our story turned out. I lived normally in this sense. My childhood was difficult not because I was hiding facts about my father, but simply for material reasons. My mother earned very little, she had two daughters; it was very difficult for her.

When we lost my father, my mother could no longer afford a housekeeper. Mother had to work, and we were home alone. I was a little girl, but I had to do all the housework: the laundry, and cleaning, and cooking, and buying groceries. We grew up very fast and fully took care of ourselves. Our nanny went to work for another family, but we kept in touch with her. I met her after the war and would help her by giving her money sometimes.

People who survived the Stalinist camps, exiles, and arrests, do not like to talk about it. As if this was some kind of secret; God forbid you speak about it! They were afraid they would be fired... So we know very little about this. My mother said that in prison the conditions were horrible. The cells were so packed that it was impossible to sleep; people slept standing up. She came with such swollen feet because she was deprived of sleep, either

they would wake her or there was no room to lie down. Her legs swelled after standing for a week or two. But somehow she survived. And she was certain, practically till her death, that neither Stalin nor Lenin was to blame. It was all the fault of some criminals, some enemies of the people. What happened there to my father, I do not know.

We had a friend named Maria Andreevna; she had two young children. They took her and her husband; there was nobody else to take care of the children, and they were sent to an orphanage. The husband was shot, and Maria was sent to a camp. She was exiled for a long time, from 1937 to 1953. She was finally rehabilitated after Stalin's death. She visited us after her release and told us the following story. When she was arrested, one of her daughters was about 3 or 4 years old, and the other was 2. She found her children after her release. They categorically denounced her, did not acknowledge her as their mother, and did not want to have anything to do with her. They told her: "You are an enemy of the people." This is how they were raised in the orphanage. She would visit us and cry. So she ended up living alone."

Childhood and Education

Zoya spent her entire life in Leningrad - from the age of 1 to 65, when she emigrated to America.

"I studied well and was an excellent student. I remember my school with great affection. In Russia at the time when I was in school, education was open to everyone. It was not like it is here: good school, bad school, expensive school, private school, free school... School was for everyone. In one class, I had a friend who was the



Zoya with her mother Rakhil and her sister Rita

daughter of a very prominent professor, while another girl had no parents, was very poor and was a street squatter before. We were all friends, regardless of financial situation. Back then we did not distinguish by who your parents were; we did not have this.

As a child I had many friends. Primarily they were my classmates. We were good friends, both boys and girls. We had a large class³, about 30 students. When the war ended, it turned out that unfortunately, the blockade wiped out almost everyone. Maybe, 5 or 6 people remained alive from our class. I was told that this one died, that one died, and that one went missing. The war started June 22nd, when we were already on our summer break, and some of the children went on vacation to other cities. I knew one boy, he was half-Jewish, who did not return from that vacation; he was shot by the Germans. Another boy, Matveev, was in Belarus that summer and was also taken by the Germans, but somehow he was saved, hidden perhaps. He was at a small Jewish village in Belarus. I had been there too before the war, because we were friends, and sometimes our parents would send us

³In the Soviet Union, a class means a group of students with a more or less permanent composition taking all courses together throughout all 10 years of schooling.

there together. He had an aunt and other relatives in that village. The Germans captured the village, and I was told later by witnesses - Russian peasants - that all of the villagers were executed. This boy managed to run away. I met him after the war. He became mentally ill from all this horror. So I have few friends left from my childhood... Mostly boys perished, the girls survived better.

In school, my favorite subjects were literature and history. Mathematics also was easy for me, and I also loved biology. I completed the 7th grade, and then the war began. After that I did not really have any more school."



"Before the war, we had one room in a communal apartment. Four people - my mother, father, my sister and I - lived in one room. It was a large room, a good room. When we came back to Leningrad

after the war, our room was occupied, and we were given another one that was only 6 meters by 6 meters, and the three of us - my mother, my sister and I - lived in that small room. Later our relatives came to join us, and there was no room to sleep, so we slept on the floor. The room had no heating. The housing situation was very difficult in Leningrad, especially after the war.

I must say that at that time, there were no rich people in general. Nobody had a lot of money or a lot of goods. The apartments were communal. This means that five or six families lived together in one apartment, and every family had one room. The bathroom was communal. We lived in an apartment with 30 other people; we had one toilet for everyone, and there was no bathtub. Every morning there was a line for the toilet.

Very often there were two or more families living in one room, like sardines in a barrel. We had two rooms for two families, and to get into the back room, you had to go through the neighbors' room. This was called a "connecting room." My friends and I do not recall anyone who had a separate apartment, like you do here. Everyone lived in large

communal apartments. I had a friend whose father was a professor of medicine. He was working on his dissertation. Their entire family lived in one room, and his desk was in the corner of a large room. He would get angry and ask us to whisper because we were interfering with his studying.

We cared for each other, helped each other the best we could. Financially, I could not help. I did not worry that I had no pretty dresses. My assistance was in that I helped children who were lagging behind at school. I tutored them after school, mostly in math. But we had something else that you don't have here. Everyone who fell behind in class copied work from others. When I came to school with completed homework, students who were not good in math were already waiting for me, and they would copy down my answers into their notebooks. When tests came, we considered it our obligation to write down the answers and quietly pass them along to those who needed them. We tried to make sure that all the students received good grades, especially on final exams. Cheat sheets were everywhere. Here, students do not let anyone copy their work."



"When the war started, I was 15 years old and had completed only seven classes. My sister was 12. There was a general feeling that there would be a war soon. The children in the 6th and 7th grades studied military science. We learned how to put on a gas mask, how to load a rifle, but most of all, we marched. We were taught to form ranks, to stand "at attention"; we played. Nobody thought that the war would begin so quickly.

It was a summer day. My friends, my classmates and I went out of town. We swam in the lake, sunbathed, and enjoyed ourselves. We were a group of 6 or 7 boys and girls. The lake was far away in the woods. When we came out of the woods, we were surprised to see large crowds of people, talking about something, listening to the loudspeaker... That's when we learned that the war had begun. We immediately went back home.

The city changed in the first days of the war. We had to hide in a bomb shelter all the time. On the second or third day, blimps went up for air defense. Soldiers appeared on the streets. We did not know what to do. People felt that they had to stock up on food; they began buying up groceries. Shelling began practically within the first few days. I saw the shells falling. We got used to this and would run to the bomb shelter. The radio would announce: "Attention, citizens! Air raid! Come down to the shelter." Shelters were arranged, and we hid there. When the raid was over, we would come out.

Then the authorities issued a strong advisory to evacuate all young children, but without parents. My sister was 12 years old at the time. My mother and I consulted, and we decided to follow the advisory. Rita was taken along with the other children in the direction of Pskov. They said that she would be safe there. Then we heard that the bombings had started there too, and my mother was horrified: "What have I done? Why did I send my child there?" She and her friend, who had also sent her daughter there, went after the children. They traveled with

great difficulty, under bombings; they had to walk part of the way. Eventually they found the place where the children were staying, and my mother brought my sister back.

In August, the Germans reached Leningrad. The authorities began mass evacuation of families with children. It was difficult to get onto the official list for the evacuation, but my mother was very resourceful. She had a very good friend in the "government circles," and she managed to get a pass for us on the last train through him. We were only allowed to take 16 kilograms⁴ of belongings and food for the 3 of us.

So the process of evacuation began. It was a very difficult and complicated journey. We were traveling to the city where I was born - to Irkutsk. The journey took almost 2 months. We traveled in boxcars. The Germans had already cut off the road between Moscow and Leningrad. We left August 20th, and the next day the road to Leningrad was cut off by the Germans; the city was in a blockade. On the way, I saw many exhausted soldiers and refugees who fled from the occupied territories. Such are my memories of

⁴ 35,2 lb

childhood.

The train was bombed and shelled. We hid in ravines near the rail tracks. We ran out of food very quickly, but some people shared their food with us, and we also traded rings and earrings for bread. We arrived very hungry and cold. We had lice. One time, I missed the train: I ran for boiling water at one of the stops, and the train left. Some strangers helped me and drove me in their car to catch up with the train.

We settled in Irkutsk at my mother's relatives. They lived in a small room, and initially we lived with them. Then we were given a room in the barracks in Irkutsk, where we stoked the coals from morning till night to keep it warm. We had a difficult life in Irkutsk. It is a very cold city, where the temperature reaches 50 degrees below zero in Centigrade. We had very little warm clothing, so it was very difficult for us. But people in Siberia are very kind. In Irkutsk there was no anti-Semitism; we did not feel any oppression. On the contrary, people helped us; they gave us clothing. My mother could not send me to school because we did not have clothing, or belongings, or food. She sent my little



Lake Baikal

sister to school and told me: "Do not even dream of going to school! We need to survive." She went to work as a laborer in some warehouse. I wanted to go to school very much, but instead I went to work with my mother. We lugged rolls of paper. Then my mother got a job in a cafeteria due to a big favor from someone. Together with my mother, I washed pots and cleaned the floors. For this my mother received a salary, and we also received rations of so-called soup: boiled water mixed with coarse rye flour. There was a very long line for this soup. Since my mother and I worked there, we got the soup without waiting in line. Sometimes they gave us an extra bowl in exchange for money.

Once mother saw a poster near our house for admission to the tax department

at a vocational school for finance and economics. I thought I would not be able to attend because the school year was already coming to an end, and the students had been studying all winter. But my mother said: "We are evacuees; they should take you." We went there together. The director was also from Leningrad and was sympathetic to my case. I told her that I would study day and night to catch up, and I was admitted! As a college student, I received a small living stipend.

Courses seemed easy to me. The teachers were not very capable, and neither were the students. There were only female students, as the boys had all been drafted into the army. I caught up to everyone very quickly and was receiving A's within a month. At the same time I kept working, helping my mother wash the floors. I also delivered mail and helped someone care for their baby. Even my sister tried to help by working.

When the spring came, everyone from the city was sent to do agricultural work in the fields. My mother and I were sent to a collective farm. My sister, at age 12, was left home alone; my mother left her flour and potatoes. I was 15 years old, but

I had to fulfill the quota - weed 5 acres. And if the quota was not reached, people did not receive their ration of bread. It was difficult for me; I was not used to such work. So other girls helped me. That's how I fulfilled the quota. After some time at the farm, I came home for a few days on a brief vacation and saw that my sister was practically dying of hunger. I took her with me and together we easily reached the quota. That's how we survived.

I finished vocational school at age 17, within 2 years. After that I could attend a university. I did not want to enroll in a finance program; I wanted to be a teacher of Russian language and literature, and also history, but I was told: "Since you graduated from a finance vocational school, you cannot be admitted anywhere else." So I went to the Irkutsk Institute of Finance. By night I worked at a hospital (as a volunteer for the first year), and by day I either attended classes at the university or worked at home.

It also happened that during the war, I worked as a teacher for six months at a village school; I was about 17-18 years old. In the fall, all students from the Institute were sent to the farm to do

agricultural work. We started weeding large sections of vegetable patches. Each worker (student) had to weed 5 acres in one day; this is a large section. First we weeded, then cut down hay and raked it into stacks. Then we harvested potatoes. All this by hand, we did not even have gloves. And so we dug, and carried heavy sacks, it was difficult work. The bags weighed up to 16 kilograms. And then the school year started, and there was no teacher in this village. The head of the farm came to us and asked: "Who wants to be a teacher? I will release you from field work." I was the first to agree - instead of freezing in the field and gathering potatoes, I could teach! In this village school, there were few students. First period was for the first year and third year students who studied together in one room. Second period was for the second and fourth year students, also in one room. So I taught two different levels simultaneously.

Then I began thinking about joining the Red Army as a volunteer. All of us, both boys and girls, - we all wanted to go fight the Germans. The boys who were 18 years old were drafted immediately. Girls were admitted to nursing courses. When

I turned 17, I forged my age a bit in my documents, and went to the draft board. They took me. For four months I was



studying at a military medical program. We were taught to apply bandages, treat fractures, but mostly we were trained in the military profession: how to crawl on our

bellies, shoot rifles and machine guns, disassemble weapons, put on gas masks, and use the Morse code. Despite taking these courses, I did not abandon my higher education. I spent the night at the hospital, and in the morning I would run to the Institute. I learned as if I was a student in absentia: I read the material on my own and took tests. Later, when I completed the medical training, I was sent to work at a hospital in Irkutsk. The wounded were brought from the west. I spent a year working at that hospital and was awarded promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant of Medical Service. For me this was difficult work: I had to make dressings and give injections. It's a very difficult job and I could not do this, so I asked those in

charge if I could simply be a cleaning lady or a nurse assistant. So I transferred to do the washing and cleaning up.

I flew in a plane to the front lines twice. Our team was responsible for bringing the seriously wounded who needed complicated operations to Irkutsk. Most were brought in by trains, but those who had especially bad wounds were brought in on small American airplanes. There were not even any benches on the planes. We had to seat on the floor with the wounded.

Then came 1945, the end of the war. In the hospital where I worked there were the wounded, the sick, those on crutches, those without legs, the blind... You cannot imagine how patriotic everyone was. When we heard about the Victory, they threw their crutches in the air with joy! Everyone kissed everyone, everyone embraced everyone. Vodka appeared from somewhere. It was such a great holiday for us! My mother had never drunk alcohol in her life. During the war she'd say: "If the war ever ends, I will get drunk." And in fact, when I ran home that day, she had a "small" bottle of vodka, and we drank to the Victory! It was a great, great holiday! That's my military history."

After the War

When the war ended, Zoya demobilized and moved back to Leningrad in 1945. There she studied at a Finance Institute and lived in a student dormitory, in a room with 4 other girls. Her mother and sister returned to the city only a year later, because not everybody was allowed to return to Leningrad immediately after the war.

When they returned, the family was unable to secure their old room in the communal apartment. During the war it had been occupied, and the new inhabitants did not want to give it up. The matter reached the courts, but was not



Zoya at her Institute

settled. Zoya believes that the judge was bribed by the janitor who had occupied their room. In compensation, Zoya's family was given a much smaller room of 6 square meters.

Beloved Profession

In 1947, Zoya graduated from the Institute of Finance and went to work at a bank as a loan officer. Her responsibility was to give out million ruble loans to different organizations and factories. At first, she was very worried, but then she got used to this huge responsibility. The salary was good, but she did not like the work. She had dreamed of being a teacher since childhood: "I had a very good teacher in the first grade. My first teacher was Aleksandra Nikolaevna Ikonnikova. I still remember her. I liked very much how she worked with the school children. This fostered love for the teaching profession in me, and practically from the first grade I dreamed of becoming a teacher. I didn't care what to teach — any subject; or at what level - high school or elementary;

just as long as I could teach... That's how much I fell in love with the teaching profession."

While still attending the Institute, Zoya took courses for a sub-specialization in the Department of Education. After a few months of working at the bank, a teaching position opened up at the Institute, and Zoya came to work at the Leningrad Institute of Finance and Economics, where she had studied economics. Later she also taught at the Leningrad Textile Institute in the department of advanced training for industry workers: "I loved my work. I was happy all my life that I worked as a teacher, although teachers at the Institute received a pittance. I liked explaining things to people and helping them."

Family

Zoya knew her husband since childhood. Ruvim Lvovich Ofengeym was 4 years older than Zoya. Before the war, they lived in the same apartment building

and attended the same school, and their mothers were friends. In 1940 after finishing 10th grade, Ruvim was drafted into the Army. He chose the air force and was sent to a flight school in Crimea. A year later, the war broke out, and he went to the front lines, having completed his training at an accelerated pace. He fought the entire war as a pilot, took part in many battles, and witnessed the deaths of many of his comrades. Zoya says that of his large graduating class, only two boys returned from the front. Ruvim was lucky to be alive. He was demobilized in 1947 and returned to Leningrad.

Zoya and Ruvim were married a month after his return, on August 22, on his birthday. Ruvim wanted to continue flying, but Zoya did not like it, as she was afraid that he could crash. He was unable to go to school for another profession, because he had to work to support his family and elderly mother. So Ruvim found a position of a mechanic at a state construction management organization which built paper textiles and timber processing plants.

Zoya and Ruvim Lvovich had two sons.

Unfortunately, the eldest son died of cancer 8 years ago in Russia. He was the chief engineer for an organization in Saint Petersburg which built bridges and roads. His daughter, Zoya's granddaughter, is 38. She married and settled down in Germany. Zoya does not approve of this marriage: "Despite the fact that now is a different time, I think it is unpleasant to have Germans in our family."

The younger son lives in Boston and works as a programmer. He graduated



Zoya and Ruvim, 1945

from the prestigious Leningrad Institute of Technology, but in America he was unable to find work in his profession, so he retrained as an engineer. His daughter graduated from college this year and works

for a recruiting company, while his son is a researcher in the field of neurosurgery.



Zoya remembers how in the 1950s there was a massive surge of anti-Semitism in all fields of science and culture: "Jews were being fired from their jobs. Young Jews were not accepted to universities, sometimes their documents were not even accepted for admission. I saw how my best teachers, professors, talented people were dismissed from work under various pretexts. Anti-Semitism was raging, and there was nothing we could do." Zoya's oldest son was an all-around excellent student and wanted to study mathematics at the university. But everyone told him that the examination committee would make sure he fails and advised him to

attend a second-tier institute, so he would be accepted for sure and not be drafted into the Army. This was in 1965. He was admitted to the Institute of Water Transport on the first try and graduated with excellent grades.

The younger son, Leonid, felt his inequality in school already from the age of 10 or 12. At 12 he began to study Jewish history on his own and attend services at a synagogue. He was called a Zionist. He joined one of the "circles" for studying Hebrew with his friend Vova Pritzker. When he turned 16, they both filed a petition for emigration to Israel and were given the state's authorization to leave. Vova's parents allowed him to leave right away, and he left for Israel alone in 1975. Vova's parents were Refuseniks; they had been fired from their jobs, they had nothing to live on and had nowhere to go. So their son went alone at age 16. Leonid was expelled from the university twice for his participation in Zionist circles. As a result, he had to change to a part-time status.

Emigration

After Vova Pritzker's departure, Leonid asked Zoya for a permission to leave as well, but she did not let him go: "He threw himself at my feet, begging me to let him leave. I refused. Then for some time the authorities clamped down on emigration and only resumed giving out permits little by little in 1988." Zoya says she did not want to emigrate to Israel, but helped the Refuseniks: "When I visited the Refuseniks around Leningrad, I would be introduced like this: "This is Zoya Grigorievna, who does not want to go to Israel." No word was spoken about America among these Zionist patriots; everyone wanted to go to Israel. My first husband passed away; at that time I had another husband (we were not officially married). He left for Israel in 1974. He also begged me, but I did not go. I was afraid. I had a young son and a sick mother who did not want to go. That is why I was introduced this way in these

circles. But I helped however I could: I got them medicine, helped them go to different agencies to collect all the documents needed for emigration, etc.

For example, I can tell you about this episode. There was a guy who had graduated from a university and who was allowed to leave, but only under the condition that he reimburses the state for the cost of his higher education. This was a colossal amount of money. He lived with his mother and did not have this kind of money. We all raised money by asking all our friends to contribute. We gathered the necessary sum (I don't remember exactly how much), and he was allowed to leave. He became a politician in Israel."

When emigration out of the USSR was allowed again in 1988, Leonid and his wife Galya (his fellow Zionist) and their small son Dmitry left for Israel: "They were longing for Israel. They already had connections there, they had been preparing. They were among the first to leave. By this time even I was ready for them to go. I was afraid that they would be put in jail for their Zionist activity." After Leonid and his wife left the USSR and landed in Europe, they decided not to go to

Israel and instead went to Vienna to wait for immigration documents to America. One of Leonid's friends who was already living in the U.S. advised them to bypass Israel and come to America instead. He sent them an invitation.

Zoya was so happy teaching, she did not want to leave. In addition, she did not speak Hebrew, she had to take care of her sick mother, and she did not want to leave Russia. She emigrated only in 1990. She had several reasons: "To be honest, I did not really want to leave and would not



have gone anywhere. But my youngest son wrote that he had no one to leave the child with, and it was difficult for them. They asked me to come and help. By that time, my mother passed away. In essence, I was left alone in Russia, though I still

had my eldest son there. But he was well established and did not want to emigrate. There was nothing in the shops: no food, no consumer products. I had money, but the shops were empty. What kind of life is this? So then I decided - I would go! The biggest reason was this feeling that with my money I cannot buy anything. And I had a few experiences with anti-Semitism. At the Institute, at work, among the students there were no incidents, everything was fine, but at the community level I sometimes ran into outright hatred.

For example, I was standing in line for potatoes once, and some woman pushed me out of the line and said: "Just leave for your Israel! There's no need for you to stand in line here." Another instance: a Fascist symbol was painted on my doors.

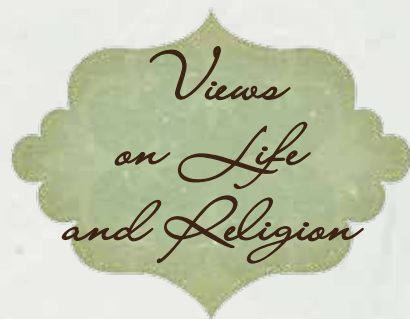
My former students called to warn me: “Zoya Grigorievna, it’s dangerous for you to stay alone at home today. Come spend the night with us!” Or I would get a call from the dean’s office: “We are taking you off the schedule for this day. Do not come because we heard rumors there may be hooliganism and protests!” But how could I not go to work?! I lived there all my life, why would I be afraid to go to my lectures?! Of course I went, and nothing happened. But these are the moments that are unpleasant and difficult for me to remember. I honestly told the Institute that I was leaving to join my son. Until then I had not spoken on the subject of emigration. I was not a Refusenik.”

For Zoya it was difficult to part with the city, with her colleagues, friends, and with her students. It was especially difficult to part with her beloved work. “When I came to the U.S., I settled in Needham, and there I felt very detached from life. There were no buses running on Saturday or Sunday, and they did not run in the evenings either. I was stuck there in that ‘village’. It was difficult for me, and I felt drawn back to Leningrad. I wrote to my eldest son: “Go to the director of the

Institute and ask whether they will take me back to work if I return.” He wrote to me that the director answered: “If Zoya Grigorievna returns today, tomorrow we will put her on the schedule to teach.” So



I considered going back instead of being stuck in the ‘village’. Aside from work, I was drawn to Russia because of my family. My sister (she is a dentist) and my eldest son and granddaughter lived there. My son would come visit us in America, but did not want to emigrate.”



“My grandchildren are “infected” with religiosity; they go to synagogue every Saturday. They attended a Jewish school

and speak Hebrew. But I don’t criticize them. In my long life I have not seen God help anyone; so why pray?

I went to the synagogue at HRC one time. In general, I do not go. In all my life in Russia I went to a synagogue twice: when I was emigrating, I had to get some documents and certificates from there. When I came to the U.S., I wanted to see the temples of various religions: a synagogue, a Russian church, a Catholic cathedral, a Protestant church, Chinese temples, Buddhist temples... I went to all of them to see how various services are conducted.

Because my specialty is economics, I am interested in the economy and the operation of private businesses. Frankly, I don’t really like this economic system; I was brought up with the teachings of Marx. I believed that America is a country which exploits the working class by expropriating the fruits of their labor. There were shortcomings in Russia, of course, but I see them not in the system as a whole, but rather in the fact that very unjust people seized power. For example, I still believe that Lenin and Plekhanov, who

were great economists, did not struggle for their personal benefit. They wanted to establish socialism in one independent country. Now I believe that this was a mistake. They fought for worldwide socialism. They wanted to overthrow the capitalist regime in all countries, but it turns out there is nothing better than capitalism for the economy. Now I agree with the fact that socialism, and even communism, is a utopia. Mankind is so imperfect, there is so little honesty, that for now it is impossible. Maybe in 100 years...

I had to live in the country a little and gain some experience to understand what I did not like about America. I do not really like the educational system. Education is expensive. Healthcare is costly. In Russia, both were free. The American education is long and too general. My granddaughter attended university for 4 years and still does not know who she will be! Our students had living stipends. It was a pittance, but it was some money. Children from the poorest families could go to a university because they did not have to pay. I myself lived off a stipend when I was a student. It was difficult, but we had

enough for bread and for water, and we could survive. The same with doctors: the medical care was not very good, but I could always go to the doctor and not spend a penny. I also do not like how people are valued in America: this one is well-off, that one lives in poverty... It's all about making money, money, money. Money is everything. We did not have this attitude in my time.

I maintain the Russian culture even in America. I know Russian literature, and artists, and theatre culture, and poetry. I read Russian books and watch a lot of Russian television. I love to write poetry when I am in the mood for it."



Zoya and David, 2015

Autumn in Newton

Прекрасна осень в Ньютоне,
На берегу реки.
Деревья разноцветные
И шорохи листвы.
Идешь дорожкой узкою,
Любуешься красой.
Природой нашей созданной
Как будто неземной.
Бредешь вот с этим "вокером",
И думаешь о том,
Что жизнь не зря потрачена,
И вспомнишь о былом.
И было хорошее время,
И были лихие года,
Но все, что случилось,
случалось со мною,
Со мною уйдет навсегда.
Люблю я и позднюю осень;
Деревья без листьев стоят.
И словно нагие девицы
Смущенно так смотрят на нас.
Красавицы, вы не горюйте!
Дождитесь прихода весны!
Она вас оденет зеленым нарядом,
И будете вы хороши.
Спасибо Америке доброй!
Примите от всех нас поклон.
За то, что наш возраст осенний
Согрела весенним теплом.

I don't love you, my Russia...

Я не люблю тебя, моя Россия,
Я честно говорю, что не люблю.
Забрав отца, украла мое детство,
И юность исковеркала мою.
Мне б в восемнадцать с мальчиком
встретаться,
Любимой быть, самой любить.
Но я должна была над раненым
склоняться,
И утки, судна выносить.
Мне б в восемнадцать по полям, лугам
носиться,
Весенний аромат цветов вдыхать.
А я должна была в палате тесной
И гноем, кровью и мочой дышать.
Ну что ж? Была война. Мы, Родина,
тебя любили,
И жизни не жалели, чтоб тебя спасти.
И в смертный бой шли рядом русские,
татары и евреи
Сражались рядом, погибали рядом.
Не спрашивая наций, возраста,
наград,
Погибших в братскую могилу
опускали.
Назвав одним лишь именем —
Советской Армии солдат.

Ну что ж? Была война. Но, Родина, ты
нас не оценила,
На классы, группы разделила,
Вот нам, евреям, бирки прилепила,
Людьми другого сорта назвала.
И это вам нельзя, и это невозможно,
А то совсем запрещено.
И не ходите, не просите —
Такое указание сверху нам дано.
Я не люблю тебя, моя Россия,
Я честно говорю, что не люблю.
Но верю, что изменишься уже
в другое время
И будешь справедливей и добрей.
Тогда вернусь к тебе в другое время
И назову любимой Родиной моей.

For more information about the Experiential Learning Practicum, please visit these websites
<http://www.brandeis.edu/bgi/>
and <http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/grall/russian/>
or contact us at bgi@brandeis.edu and grall@brandeis.edu (for Russian Studies)

Translated by Kristen Foaksman'16 and Breanna Vizlakh'16, Brandeis University students

