

# Rita Vilkobrisckaya Biography

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Rita Vilkobrisckaya and her husband Jacob Honiksmann, Professor of History, an outstanding activist of the Jewish culture, live in a beautiful spacious apartment. They don't have any children. Everything shows that this couple dedicates most of their time to books of literature and history. The study is full of bookshelves packed with books. Rita is an educated woman and it is a pleasure to talk with her. She is a well read person and makes an impression of a person that has had a good life.

The story of birth and youth of my father Michael Vilkobrisckiy is tragic. I don't know his parents. All I know is that my grandfather Moisey Vilkobrisckiy was a coachman in the town of Wilno [present Vilnius – the capital of Latvia]. He married my grandmother around 1900. My father, born on 14 November 1902 was their first and only child. My grandmother (I don't know her name) died shortly after my father was born. I don't have much information about what happened afterward. All I know is that my grandfather left the child. My grandmother Hasia, my mother's mother, told me about it. She heard this from some acquaintances of hers. My father never told me anything about it – he couldn't stand any mention of his father whom he had never seen.

My father was adopted by the Jewish family of retail grain merchant, their family name was Ioffe, Ioffe's family moved to Odessa. Childless families used to adopt orphan children. I guess, they moved to avoid any talks about adoption. They didn't want their boy to hear that they were not his parents. In 1906 adoptive father Ioffe died and his widow and my father moved to Vitebsk, in Russia, where her relatives lived. I don't know the name of the woman that raised my father. I only know that she went to work after her husband died. My grandmother Hasia told me that the woman became a traveling agent that was not a typical women's job. She traveled to other towns selling commodities of a company. I have no information about religiosity of my father's adoptive parents. My father never observed any Jewish traditions, although he knew Yiddish. He went to primary school and in 1912 - 1915 he studied at High School in Vitebsk.

In 1915 some people, probably neighbors, told my father that he was an adopted child. His reaction was weird and I still cannot understand or forgive him for what he had done. He left his adoptive mother and home. He had to give up his studies since he had to earn his living. He never saw his adoptive mother again. A neighbor said that after he left her she fell ill and died in few months. I believe, my father was sorry for what he had done for the rest of his days and this was the reason why he never talked about his adoptive mother.

My father began to work at the electro technical shop of Mr. Mendelson, a Jew, in Vitebsk. He was an apprentice and finally became an electrician. He worked there until the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919 he got fond of revolutionary ideas and went to work at the factory of agricultural machines that belonged to the Unemployment Committee [1].

This was the period of Civil War [2], and on 15 October 1919 my father volunteered to the Red army. He became a private in reserve rifle battalion. This battalion was formed in Kazan. On 13 December 1919 my father became a member of the Communist party and then their regiment was

sent to fight with the white guard units [3]. My father took part in battles with General Wrangel [4] units. There were military from various parts of the country. They were mainly workers and peasants that believed in the ideas of communism. My father told me that they had sufficient food and uniforms. They lived in barracks that they built themselves. Their living conditions were far from good. In 1920 my father was severely wounded and stayed a long while in hospitals until he was sent to an advanced training course for professional military in Minsk, Byelorussia, in January 1922. He was eager to study and willingly went to Minsk to study aviation.

My maternal grandparents Ilia and Hasia Eishynskiy lived in the town of Lubcha in Minsk province. I don't know where they came from. My grandfather Ilia Eishynskiy was born in the middle of 1870s and my grandmother Hasia was born in 1881. Grandfather Ilia was a cheese maker. He rented a cheese dairy from a landlord, don't know who owned it. He worked alone and only sometimes he hired employees in summer when there was much milk. He mustn't have produced much cheese since he was selling it by retail. The family was very poor and their life became extremely miserable after grandfather Ilia died in 1914.

Grandmother Hasia had to raise seven children. She went to do daytime work: washed floors, did laundry and worked at the bakery. She had no education and had to do any work to support her children. The children helped her about the house. In 1917 the family moved to Minsk running away from pogroms [5]. Older children went to work and the younger ones, including my mother, were sent to a children's home. It was a Soviet children's home for orphan or homeless children of all nationalities. Children lived and studied there. The children also attended dance, singing or technical clubs at the boarding school. The children were raised in the socialist and communist spirit. There were about 300 children in this home, 10-12 children in one room, girls and boys lived separately. Children were allowed to visit their relatives at weekends, but my grandmother didn't take my mother home often since she didn't have food to give her. My mother didn't like to recall this period and told me very little about it. Before they moved to Minsk they observed Jewish traditions, but after moving to Minsk the children in the family got fond of revolutionary ideas and dropped religion. Grandmother celebrated few holidays as tribute to the past. The oldest son died when he was a child. The next came Maria, born in 1900. She didn't study, but helped grandmother to raise the younger children. At 14 she went to work as a laborer at some plant.

Khona was born around 1901-02. During the Soviet regime Khona worked at a timber facility. All I know is that he was married and had a daughter. After the western part of Byelorussia в 1939 joined the USSR the Great Patriotic War began [6]. They failed to evacuate and most likely perished during occupation.

My mother's brother Efim, born in 1905, became a pilot in the Minsk aviation unit after he finished an aviation school. He married a Jewish girl and they had two children. I have no information about their life before the war. He perished in combat action in Minsk at the very beginning of the Great Patriotic War in 1941. His wife Milia and daughter Tamara evacuated few hours before Germans entered Minsk. They were in evacuation in Olevsk Altaysk region. After the war they lived in Kharkov. We were not in contact with them after the war.

Max, born in 1906, was recruited to the army on the 2nd day of the Great Patriotic War. He vanished. His wife and daughter stayed in Minsk and must have perished, too. This is all I know. I

never saw any of my mother's brothers or sisters except Sophia. We left Minsk shortly after I was born and my mother was not in contact with them after she got married.

My mother's sister Sophia, born in 1903, lived in Smolensk before the Great Patriotic War. After finishing a medical school she worked as medical nurse. Sophia married a Russian man, I don't know his name. They had a daughter Vilena (named after Vladimir Illich Lenin) Her first marriage broke before the war and she remarried Nikanor Kabachkov after the war. During the war she was recruited to the army and worked in a hospital. After that Sophia settled down in the town of Dmitrov near Moscow. Sophia was a member of the Communist Party. I don't know when she joined the Party. Her second husband was Russian, his name was a Nikanor Kabachkov. They had two sons: Yuri and Vladimir, that became engineers. My mother received letters from them every now and then, but I took no interest in any of them. Sophia died in mid 1970s.

My mother Bertha Eishynskaya, the youngest in the family, was born in Lubcha town in 1907. From 1917 she and her brothers Efim and Max was raised at a children's home in Minsk where she got a lower secondary education. After finishing school in 1924 my mother went to work as envelope maker at the envelope factory in Minsk and later went to work at confectionery factory. In 1925 she joined Komsomol [7] and in 1928 she became a candidate and then a member of the Communist Party.

My mother's family had a hard life in 1920s. My mother's older brothers and sisters left home in search for a job. My mother never told me about this period of their life or any celebrations or traditions.

In Minsk my father met Maria Eishynskaya, my mother's older sister, I don't know how or where they met. They got married and in 1923 their son Ilia, was born, he was named after his grandfather. Maria died of galloping consumption in 1926. Before she died she demanded that my father promised her to marry her younger sister Bertha. She also asked Bertha to agree to marry my father. She wanted him to be well set and cared for.

My mother was an active and cheerful girl. Her friends were her schoolmates of various nationalities. Nationality was an issue of no importance at that time. She had many friends in Minsk and Smolensk where she went to visit her sister Sophia. Therefore, when her older sister Maria asked her to marry her husband before she died, this suggestion was a complete and quite undesirable surprise for my mother. My mother didn't love my father, but grandmother Hasia said 'Bertha, marry Michael for Ilia's sake'. In 1929 my mother married Michael Vilkobrisiski. At that time he had an important position in Minsk aviation regiment. They had a civil ceremony at a registry office and a wedding dinner at home in the evening. I guess, at that time my father was more like a friend to my mother. She wasn't in love with him, but she had to follow her sister's will. However, in due time she fell in love with him while he just adored her. The more my parents learned about one another the closer they became. They lived their life in love for 25 years.

I, was born on 28 October 1930. I got a Jewish name of Riva at the time of birth, but was always called Rita months after I was born my father was transferred to study in Leningrad [St. Petersburg at present] and we moved there: grandmother Hasia, father, mother, my half brother Ilia and I. My father studied at the Military Political Academy named after Lenin. My mother went to work at a big printing house and in 1932 she went to study at Rabfak school [8] at the printing house. My older brother Ilia studied at school and I stayed home with grandmother Hasia. My grandmother always

lived with our family and moved to all locations where my father got another assignment. I have no memories of our life in Leningrad.

In 1934 upon graduation from the Academy my father was transferred to Eysk town near Rostov-on-the-Don (in Russian it sounds 'Rostov na Donu', it stands on the Don River) in 1000 km from Leningrad. My father was a commissar of a navy air squadron. My mother also went to work as organizer at this same unit: she taught young mothers housekeeping, childcare, cooking while grandmother took care of her own home. My mother joined the Party at this unit. We stayed in Eysk maximum half a year.

At the beginning of 1935 the squadron was transferred to Krasnaya Rechka town near Khabarovsk in the Far East in 7500 km from home. We lived in the neighborhood for families of the military – there were few two-storied buildings there. We had a two-room apartment in a two-storied building. There was no running water and we fetched water from a pump nearby and washed ourselves in a basin in the room. Grandmother did all housekeeping and my mother, as usual went to work at the women's division of the military unit. My mother had a lot of energy and talent. She organized various clubs and concerts. She liked dancing and singing. She organized a dancing club attended by almost all officers' wives danced Russian national and modern dances. They often rehearsed at our home preparing for celebration of 7 November [9] or 1 May. There were parties and concerts that my mother organized on Soviet holidays. Officers' wives and children performed singing patriotic Soviet songs, reciting poems and dancing. This was a nice entertainment. We lived a life full of joy. We didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays, I don't know whether there were other Jews around us, it didn't matter. I guess my grandmother that grew up in a small town where there was a strong Jewish community celebrated Jewish holidays before the revolution of 1917 [10], but after the revolution she probably was afraid of damaging my father's reputation of devoted communist since he was a commissar of a big aviation unit. Grandmother Hasia spoke poor Russian and home my mother and father spoke Yiddish with her. I wasn't taught Yiddish, though and Hasia tried to speak Russian to me.

My father loved me dearly. He was very busy at work and came home late after work, but he always found time to go for a walk with me at weekends and I always looked forward to his returning home. He took me out of town where we could enjoy beautiful views walking. Father bought me candy and toys, took me to the cinema and in winter we skied and tobogganed. Once my grandmother and I went hiking in the hills out of town. I saw a plane and a man with a parachute jumping out of it. I screamed 'That's my father flying there!' It happened to be my father, indeed. This was his regular jump with a parachute, but it was unsuccessful: his parachute didn't open and he landed with a reserve parachute and injured his arm and face. This was his last jump – he never did it again.

We lived in Krasnaya Rechka for over a year and in 1936 we moved to Khabarovsk where my father got his next job assignment. We got an apartment in a two-storied building inhabited by families of military. I went to a kindergarten. I can't remember whether it was in the kindergarten or in the yard when somebody called me 'zhydovka' [11] I didn't know the meaning of the word, but I felt it was an abuse. I didn't tell my mother or grandmother about it, but in the evening I told my father. I cried and asked my father why they called me so. My father told me that I was a Jew and that evil people didn't like Jews and abused them. He told me that I should always remember that Jews are

ancient people that gave this world many famous people and that I should be proud of belonging to this nation and pay no attention to any abuse. I believed him and never forgot what he said.

In 1937 I went to a Russian school. I was the only Jewish pupil, but there were Russian, Ukrainian, two German and one Uzbek child in my class and there was a Chinese girl that was my friend; I didn't think about nationalities then. No one ever abused me again, but I remembered that first time I felt so hurt.

In summer 1938 I went to a pioneer camp near Khabarovsk. In few days after I arrived the director of this camp came to see me and told me and few other children to pack our things. We were put on a truck and sent home. I cried all the way home. We didn't get any explanation, but I had a feeling that something went very wrong. At home my grandmother was crying when she met me. Ilia was lying on the sofa with his face turned to the wall. My mother was not home. My grandmother and I sat at the table and she said 'Your father is under arrest. He is accused of being an enemy of the people, but you need to know that your father is a devoted communist. He is innocent'. 'I've never forgotten what my grandmother, an ordinary Jewish woman, told me. This is all I was told then, but only much later I got to know the details of this period in the history of the country – the period of repression [12]. Our life changed dramatically. Members of few other families in our building were arrested. We had to move to another house that was called 'Round Tower'. This was an old round-shaped building with one big room – it was like a gym - where many families lived behind partitions made from sheets. There was no furniture and we slept on the blankets that we brought from home. Our main food was bread and we fetched water from a well. The only thing that united all those people was the mischief that happened. There were no conflicts or even arguments in this building. My mother went at night (since there were lines of relatives and parcels were only accepted from 7 till 8 am) to stand in line with other officers' wife to leave a parcel for my father with dried bread, cigarettes and soap. Sometimes the jail warden didn't accept a parcel and mother came home in tears after standing in line for half a night. My mother was pregnant and was afraid that all these happenings were too much for her and the baby to bear.

She worked at the timber trust where she was involved in public activities – same as before: organization of cultural events. After my father was arrested mother was expelled from the party. She was accused of anti-Soviet propaganda and that she had been involved in it since we lived in Krasnaya rechka and that the dancing club that she organized was just another blinder to hide the essence of her activities. Her accusers demanded that she divorced from my father and acknowledged that he was an enemy of the people, but she kept saying 'my husband is an honest man and cannot be a traitor ...'. Some other officers' wives gave up to the pressure and acknowledged their husbands guilty. Fortunately, my mother was not arrested. I believe, this was because she was in the last months of her pregnancy. My mother's boss happened to be a very decent man. He didn't fire her and even gave us a room in a communal apartment, even though my mother was accused of anti-Soviet activities and expelled from the Party. I remember a long hallway with doors in this apartment. There was a huge kitchen with kerosene and primus stoves. After the 'Round Tower' this room seemed beautiful to us. There were other children in my class whose parents were repressed, but this was not discussed and attitudes didn't change.

On 8 January 1939 my mother gave birth to a girl. She was named Inessa after Inessa Armand, an outstanding revolutionary and Lenin's comrade [13]. In April 1939 my father was released. He was

lucky. In 1939 after Minister of State Security Ezhov was arrested [14] for exceeding his authority and new minister Beriia [15] was appointed some prisoners were released under the verdict to Ezhov about unjustified repression. My father returned home very ill and thin. He had furuncles all over his body. He didn't tell me or my brother anything. He only said that he was accused of espionage for many countries including Japan, but he didn't sign one single paper. I guess he told my mother about endless interrogations, tortures and what he had to endure: everything that became known after denunciation of the cult of Stalin.

My father regained his membership in the Party and so did my mother. My father got back his job and we received our apartment back. Our life continued as if there had been no arrest. In April 1941 my father was awarded a trip to a military recreation center at a resort in Nalchik town in Northern Caucasus. My father took grandmother Hasia with him: she wanted to see her children: Khona, Max, Efim and Sophia. While my father stayed at the recreation center grandmother went to visit her children. They all asked her to stay with them, but grandmother refused. Khona from Western Byelorussia was particularly insistent. She told them that she was used to living with Bertha and Michael and that they needed her assistance. Khona was a little bit hurt. When we recalled this later we felt happy that grandmother refused to live with them or she would have perished as her family did.

At the end of May 1941 my father and grandmother returned to Khabarovsk. On 22 June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. The war seemed to be far away, but the commandment was probably concerned about possible war with Japan. They offered all officers to take their families further to the west and come back to Khabarovsk. My father couldn't think about separation with the family. I remember he lifted me and asked 'Rita, are you afraid of the war. Do you want to stay here with me or do you want to leave?' I replied that I was afraid and he said 'Let it be as my daughter decided'.

Our family along with other officers' families was evacuated to Olevsk town in Altaysk region in Siberia in 1500 km from Khabarovsk. Ilia, my older brother, studied in Navy school in Vladivostok, a town in the Far East on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, at that time. When the war began their ship was sailing near the shores of Japan, but they turned back to Russia and did he stay in Vladivostok during the war.

In Olevsk there were four of us: my mother, grandmother, sister and I. Olevsk is a small town in Siberia with one-storied buildings and population of few thousand people. There were not many people in evacuation and the locals were quite friendly with them. We lived in this town during the whole severe winter of 1941-42. We lived in a small room in a communal apartment. My mother went to work. She went to collective farms propagating to collective farmers to fight for bigger crops to give more grain to the front. There was a slogan 'Everything for the front, everything for the victory'. My mother was away for several days. On one of her trips the coach that she rode on turned over and mother broke her arm. She had cast applied on it, but she didn't stay home to wait until it healed. She went to villages and my sister and I stayed at home with grandmother. I went to school in Olevsk. The school was far from where we lived and I had to walk through knee-high snow snowdrifts.

My mother brother Efim's wife Milia and their daughter Tamara were also in evacuation in Olevsk. They left Minsk in a hurry. They were lucky to have been picked by a military truck that drove them



out of the town. They found out through the state search department that we were in Olevsk and joined us there. Later Milia's sisters Lisa and Tsylia from Moscow arrived at Olevsk. We all lived in one room, Milia and her sisters worked in a kolkhoz near Olevsk. At the end of winter in 1942 my father came to take us back to Khabarovsk and Milia, her sisters and Tamara stayed in Olevsk. Efim perished during the war and Milia remarried after the war, I don't know who her second husband was. I never saw them again. We only rarely received greeting cards from them after the war. She lived in Kharkov with her husband and daughter Tamara.

We didn't stay long in Khabarovsk. After finishing his military school Ilia came back home. My father wanted to send him to study in another military school to keep him away from the front. Ilia wanted to become a pilot and went to study in an aviation school. My father was transferred to the new location of his military service assignment to a small town of Nikolaevsk-on-the-Amur, located on the upper Amur, in 700 km from Khabarovsk, near the border with China. There were no comforts in the house where we lived. Water was delivered in barrels from the Amur River. There was no electricity and in the evening we lit a kerosene lamp. Soon we moved to Blagoveschensk-on-the-Amur, in 50 km from Nikolaevsk and from there we moved again to Voroshylov town [Ussuriysk at present], in 100 km to the northeast. Like many other families of the military we moved from one place to another so often that we left our suitcases unpacked at a new location. I didn't have time to get used to a new school or schoolmates when we had to move again. All military traveled a lot. They didn't discuss and obeyed orders from their commandment. We packed within three days and loaded our belongings on a truck to go to the new area. I don't remember any specific school or teachers. I wasn't a success with my studies. Teachers treated me indulgently knowing that I wasn't going to stay long in their school.

Families of the military received good food packages, with tinned meat, milk powder, sugar and candy. We actually didn't feel hungry like it was with other people in evacuation and the local population. The products we received in food packages were sufficient and we bought something else, like vegetables. My father got a good salary, but money couldn't buy anything. Food coupons or clothes became valuable. There was bread given on food coupons, We received sufficient coupons for living. I was responsible for standing in line that began to form at dawn, sometimes I had to stand 5-6 hours. Even vodka was given for coupons before holidays.

In 1943 my father that was in the rank of colonel was sent to the front. Father told us that he was to be there on a temporary basis and was going to return soon. Later he wrote in a letter that he wanted to stay at the front to fight against occupants. He served in a rear logistics unit, but he also took part in action. He was awarded an order of the Great Patriotic War, Order of Lenin, Order of Red Banner and medal for 'Victory over Germany'. He served in the First Ukrainian Front that liberated towns in the West and South of Ukraine, including Lvov. He also took part in the liberation of Poland and Warsaw. My father was in Vienna when the Victory Day came. He had pictures where he was photographed with his fellow comrades near the Brandenburg gates in Berlin. However, I don't know how my father happened to be in Berlin. I guess it happened after the victory.

At that time something terrible happened. After finishing the aviation school in Magdagachi town near Chita in the Far East a group of young pilots and Ilia were sent to Kamchatka Peninsula in the Pacific Ocean in the east of Russia, 12500 km from Moscow. My father was at the front at that time. Ilia came back in June 1943. He must have had a premonition since he was very reluctant to go

where he was assigned. He asked grandmother to ask our father to take him from Kamchatka when he returned home. My grandmother wrote my father to the front, but mail was slow and my father probably didn't receive this letter and couldn't help. He was even ready to go to the front instead of going to Kamchatka. Ilia was in the town of Elizovo near Petropavlovsk-in-Kamchatka. In November 1943 he died in a crash during a training flight. His plane got into spin and Ilia failed to catapult and perished. We received a letter from his military unit and later they sent us a picture of the monument on his grave: a pedestal with a star. My mother and grandmother couldn't stop crying: they didn't know how to tell Ilia's father about his death. They decided not to write him to the front. My father heard about his son's death when he came to us in Voroshylov in 1945 after the victory. He returned home in joyful excitement with all orders on his jacket, but when he heard about his son's death he had a heart attack – the first one in his life. It took him a while to recover from this tragedy. Many years afterward I wrote letters to Elizovo requesting them to find my brother's grave, but it was never found.

The Victory Day of 9 May 1945 was a real holiday for all people. We celebrated it in Voroshylov. In the morning the radio announced that war ended victoriously. We went to the street where there were crowds of people greeting each other. We believed that the worst was in the past, that when father came back our life would be a continuous holiday. My father took us from the Far East in 1945. My father, my mother and my little sister left for a new work destination of my father in the town of Langenzerdorf, near Vienna in Austria. My father was there in occupational troops. My grandmother and I lived with my aunt Sophia in Dmitrov near Moscow. My father couldn't take all of us with him, and we decided that my little sister would go with them and I would stay with grandmother. Aunt Sophia had married Nikanor Kabachkov a short time before. This was her second marriage. He was a Russian man, mechanic at a power plant. There were two sons in my aunt's family, her daughter Vilena was married and had her own life, and my grandmother and I hardly had a place to live in their apartment. We got on aunt Sophia's nerves and she didn't keep this to herself. I kept asking mother in letters to take me to live with them until in few months' time my father came to pick me up and take to Austria and grandma stay with Sophia.

At that time my father was transferred to Noggels town in 50 km from Vienna, my father was on military service in the Soviet occupational army. My father was a high-level officer and in accordance with his rank we received a 5-room mansion. There were servants working for us: few housemaids, a cook and a cleaning woman. We took it for granted and believed that father deserved it. My mother didn't work. Her Yiddish helped her to communicate with Austrians and she picked up sufficient German rather promptly. At the beginning of a week Soviet children were taken to a boarding school. Once a week children of the military were taken to boarding school by truck. Inessa went to school in 1946 and there was a girl – Inga – and a boy from our town that were taken to school by car. The boarding school was located in a beautiful town on Badenboyville near Vienna. It was a resort and our school was housed in an old fortress. We came home at weekends. We studied all mandatory subjects of the Soviet school curriculum. There were teachers from the Soviet country and we wore school uniforms that were also brought from the Soviet Union. Our school was in a distant castle and I only communicated with our schoolmates. After classes we did our homework and played in the yard. We celebrated Soviet holidays and studied Soviet patriotic songs and verses. There were 3 tenants in one room where we had comfortable beds, sinks, toilets and desks. There were children of various nationalities, but it didn't matter to me.



In autumn 1947 my father's assignment in Austria was over and shortly afterward the Soviet troops left Austria, too. My father was offered to choose a job in Kiev, Riga, Odessa or Lvov. My father liked Lvov when he was there in 1944 and he chose this town. We moved in here in September, 1947. My father was deputy political officer in a rear aviation unit. My father got a beautiful spacious apartment in Pushkinskaya, the central street in Lvov. My grandmother joined us soon.

I went to a Russian secondary school for girls – girls and boys studied separately at that time. There were few Jewish girls in this school, it wasn't important for me, but it seems to me that about that time I began to differentiate Jews by name and appearance. There were Ukrainian and Polish schools in Lvov, therefore, there were mostly Russian girls in my school since it was a Russian school. I got along well with my classmates. My classmate Lilia became my lifetime friend. We did homework together and went to the cinema or discotheque together.

Lilia's father Anrei Kamalitdinov was a Tatar man and her mother Olga Vladimirovna was Russian. Lilia's father was a hygienist and her mother was a very good children's doctor. Lilia's wanted to become a doctor since she was a child. After finishing school in 1949 she convinced me to enter a medical Institute. I and Lilia submitted our documents to the Institute, but failed to accumulate a required number of points. This had nothing to do with anti-Semitism – I was just a poor pupil at school. The rector of this institute offered me to go to the pharmaceutical faculty where competition was small, but I didn't want to. Lilia was trying to convince me to go to Tomsk in Siberia where her mother's former fellow student was Rector of the Medical Institute, but my parents were against my going there since I had a poor health – I had problems with my lungs. Lilia went to Tomsk where she entered the College and then in a year's time she transferred from Tomsk to Lvov Medical University. There were fewer students than required in three institutes: of physical culture, commercial and polygraphy. I submitted my documents to the Faculty of Economics at the Institute of Polygraphy. I passed all exams and became a student: exams were only formal and everybody could be admitted.

There were many Jewish students in my group. There was a meeting where we joined trade unions – there were trade union units in each organization – and each student stood up to say their first name, surname and patronymic. I counted 11 or 12 Jews then of 25 students in my group. However, I only studied few months with this group since I fell ill with tuberculosis. I had to take an academic leave to go to hospital. There were no medications available, but my father managed to get some streptomycin. It worked well and put me on the way to recovery. After hospital I spent few months in a great military recreation center in the Crimea. Between 1950 and 1953 I spent my summers in recreation centers for the military elite where my father made arrangements for me. I traveled there alone, but always made friends. Those were magnificent recreation centers for the military elite. There were comfortable single rooms with all comforts facing beaches. The food was nice and sufficient and there was entertainment: dancing or cinema in the evenings. I missed one year at the Institute and studied with students that entered in 1950. I met my friend Raya Meyerhold there. She lives in Israel now, with her children and grandchildren. We correspond rarely. When we were young we went to discotheque together and discussed latest news or books that we read.

In the late 1940s the attitude towards Jews changed dramatically. Newspapers and radio kept talking about 'rootless cosmopolites' [16] and doctors-poisoners [doctor's plot] [17]. There were no

arrests in our Institute, although there were Jewish lecturers. But the attitude of officials towards Jews, including Jewish students, was politely cold. We pretended we didn't notice anything and hoped that we would manage somehow, but students treated each other in the same friendly manner. Nothing changed in this regard. My father was very upset about it, although the attitude toward him didn't change. In 1952 my father had an infarction. He didn't work for a year, but when he went back to work he had another infarction almost immediately. My father was in hospital when Stalin died in March 1953. Although my father suffered during the period of repression he felt respectful toward Stalin and did not have an inch of suspicion that Stalin was to blame for repression and persecution of Jews and many other things. I remember mother smiled when talking to someone, in hospital. My father, however hopelessly ill, forbade her to smile on such a mournful day.

There was a mourning meeting at school and many students and lecturers were crying standing by the portrait of the leader, but I didn't feel like crying. I believed that the country had buried its leader, and also a tyrant, it was just my feeling and I never discussed it with anyone.

My father died on 10 January 1954. He was suffering a lot when dying. He said farewell to all of us and was concerned about me being single and he was worried that I was not settled in life. We buried him at the town cemetery in Lvov. Shortly before he died my father introduced me to a son of his fellow comrade, visiting him in the hospital. His name was Volodia. We went out for some time, but then we broke and he married my close friend. Then my friend Raya Reingold introduced me to her Jewish friends and I began to spend most of my free time with my new Jewish friends. We went to the cinema or discotheque like all other young people. We enjoyed being together. There were no Jewish or religious aspects in our life.

I graduated from the Institute in 1955. There was a conflict when I was receiving my job assignment. I was the second one to enter the room where a commission was sitting. There were various assignments available. But the commission offered me distant towns in the North: Syktyvkar, Yakutsk. I couldn't go there after I was ill with tuberculosis. Job assignment was a mandatory requirement [18]. I called my mother at home and she came to the Institute at once. She managed to make an arrangement for me to receive a so-called free 'Item 5' [19]. I decided to look for a job by myself. What an ordeal it turned out to be especially when potential employers looked at 'Item 5' [17] in my passport and I got refusals. I even went to the Ministry in Kiev to ask them to help me with employment. They promised to send me an assignment, but nothing happened. Anatolmiz Zolotukhin, a lecturer in our Institute, helped me. He had an acquaintance in the Printing Committee that helped me to obtain a job assignment in Lutsk. I got a job of an economist in a printing house.

I went to work at the beginning of October 1955 and when I came home during holidays in November my mother introduced me to Jacob Honiksmann, my mother's acquaintance introduced him to my mother and she liked him. He was a very nice young man. I met with him several times when I came to Lvov: on 5 December, Constitution Day [Soviet holiday] and on New Year. Jacob proposed to me, but I told him that I had to think about it. He was divorced and had a daughter and I had to consider his proposal. On 29 January 1956 Jacob and a friend of his came to see me in Lutsk and on the following day we got married in a district registry office. The procedure at that time included a one month waiting period after submittal of application for marriage, but Jacob was

full of charm and managed to convince a girl at the registry office to marry us and we became a husband and wife. It happened promptly since Jacob could only stay in Lutsk for two days and had to return to his work that was important for him. And for me the only opportunity to go with him was to marry him. I quit my work and came to Lvov. We had a wedding party at a restaurant on 10 March. It was a great party, but we didn't observe any Jewish traditions then. We've been together since then.

Jacob was born to a Jewish family in Lublin, Poland, in 1922. His father had no education and was a carpenter. His mother came from a more intelligent family. Her father was a Hasid tsadik. Jacob's family was very poor. Jacob was under the influence of his older stepbrother that was a communist. He struggled for the republic in Spain and perished there. Jacob had a younger brother Mordukhai and sister Freida. Jacob studied in cheder, yeshyva and in a Polish secondary school. He began to work as a carpenter's apprentice and studied in an evening school. When Hitler was preparing for intervention in Poland Jacob's mother insisted that he moved to the Soviet Union. Jacob went with his sister, but she fell ill on the way and Jacob had to take her back home. He could never forgive himself for doing this. His family perished during World WarII. We have no information about where or how they perished, but none of them survived the war.

Jacob crossed the border of the Soviet Union in the vicinity of Brest in Byelorussia. He had to go through several examinations before he obtained a passport of the soviet citizen. However, he didn't have the right to reside in Moscow, Leningrad, and capitals of the Union republics or big industrial centers [the Soviet authorities were suspicious about people that came from other countries. They were not allowed to reside in bigger towns]. Jacob worked and continued his studies. During the war he finished Kuibyshev Pedagogical Institute and later he graduated from Kiev University Faculty of History. He was married to a woman from Kiev, but since he had no right to live in Kiev he rented an apartment outside the city. In 1945 Jacob moved to Lvov where he began to work at the Jewish library of the Academy of Sciences. He was responsible for book stocks collecting books from the houses of Jews that had perished and closed synagogues, He speaks fluent Ivrit, it's his mother tongue. In 1949, at the height of state anti-Semitism Jacob left his work at the library. He taught History at school and Pedagogical Institute and later he became Professor of History in Lvov Polytechnic Institute where he still works now. In October 1960 my husband defended his thesis of Candidate of Sciences. He was also awarded a title of Candidate of Economic Sciences. He was transferred to Lvov where he became deputy director at an evening school. He was allowed to live in Lvov. Before this he actually lived with me, but had a residential permit to live in a village near Lvov [20].

In Lvov my husband helped me to get a job at the printing house of the Academy of Sciences where I worked for 12 years. Later I went to work at the planning department of design institute involved in designing machine building plants. I worked at the Planning department where I worked for over 18 years until I retired and where I never faced any anti-Semitism.

We were an affectionate family. We traveled to the Crimea or Caucasus in summer as tourists. We enjoyed traveling. We didn't celebrate at home Soviet or religious holidays, but had birthday parties. We got together with friends at birthdays and weekends to listen to music, discuss books that we read and recite poems by Soviet poets Evtushenko [21], Voznesenskiy [22] and Rybakov [23]. When Jews began to move to Israel in 1970s we sympathized with them, but we didn't even

consider moving to Israel for ourselves, We didn't have any information about Israel, there were no publications in Soviet mass media. Our house, work and friends were here and we never imagined life in another country. We earned well, went to theaters and cinema, went to restaurants with friends and were not interested in politics. My husband had to join the Party to be able to lecture at College, but in 1980s he resigned from the Party after writing an application for resignation where he explained that he 'disagreed with the policy of the Party and didn't want to be its member'. My mother and grandmother lived with us. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions. My grandmother died in 1957. We buried her at the town cemetery in Lvov. My mother died in 1989. She was buried beside my father and grandmother.

My sister Inessa also graduated from the Institute of Polygraphy. Upon graduation she worked at a printing house in Leningrad. Inessa got married there. Her husband Efim Osheroov, a Jewish man, he was a polygraphist he was also the atheist. Inessa and Efim died in 1999. Their son Michael lives in Saint Petersburg. He is my closest relative since Jacob and I don't have children. Michael's daughter became my friend. She often calls me and sends small gifts.

Perestroika in 1980s was like new wind for us. There were many books published that had been forbidden before and the Jewish life and culture revived. Jacob has always been interested in Jewish subjects. In the recent years he got involved in the studies of Jewish history being Professor and historian. He wrote several books about the history of Jewish people and Holocaust, they were published in Lvov. His books issued by the Lvov Jewish society named after Sholem Alechem: 'Catastrophe of Jews in Western Ukraine', 300 pages, published in 1998, 5000 copies; 'Jews of Brody Town 1584-1944', 2001, 2000 copies; 'Yanovskiy camp', 1996, 3000 copies; 'People, years, events. From our ancient history', 1998, 3000 copies; '600 years and two years', about the history of Jews in Drogobych and Boryslav, 1999, 2000 copies, and others. He founded the Sholem Alechem [24] society in Lvov. This society studies and popularizes books by Jewish writers. He gives lectures on the history of Jews in Hesed and I help him to collect materials for his lectures. Jacob has involved me in Jewish activities. I read Jewish newspapers, published in the Lvov community in Russian and attend sittings at the society. We visit Hesed and have many new friends there. We study traditions of our people at Hesed. We celebrate Jewish holidays and Sabbath at the Sholem Alechem society. We don't follow any rituals or say prayers, but I cook traditional food and we always have matzah at Pesach. My husband is a big patriot of Israel. If it were not for my poor health condition (I've had few infarctions and have contra-indications related to hot climate) we would move to Israel. Regretfully, we've never been there, but we've read a lot and watched movies about this amazing country. Since we don't have an opportunity to move to Israel we've committed ourselves to revival of the Jewish nation and Jewish traditions in our country that is our Motherland. However, even now I wouldn't leave my country for Israel.

#### GLOSSARY:

1. Unemployment Committee was established in 1918. It had employment functions.
2. CIVIL WAR 1917-1922. By early 1918, a major civil war had broken out in Russia--only recently named the USSR--, which is commonly known as the civil war between the "Reds" and the "Whites". The "Reds" were the Bolshevik controlled Soviets. During this time the Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist party. The "Whites" were mostly Russian army units from the world war who were led by anti-Bolshevik officers. They were also joined by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. During this civil war, the Bolsheviks

- signed a separate peace with Germany and finally ended Russia's involvement with the world war. 8 to 13 mln. people perished in the war. Up to 2 mln. people moved to other countries. Damage constituted over 50 billion rubles in gold, production rate reduced to 4-20% compared with 1913.
3. A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.
4. Wrangel Petr (1878-1928) served in active field commands within the Russian army during World War One and was a prominent White anti-Bolshevik leader from 1917-20.
5. During the Civil War in 1918-1920 there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.
6. 22 June 1941 – memorable day for all Soviet people. It was the first day of the great Patriotic War when the Germans crossed the border of their country bringing the war to its terrain. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.
7. Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.
8. Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.
9. October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.
10. In early October 1917, Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party to form an immediate insurrection against the Provisional Government. The Bolshevik leaders felt it was of the utmost importance to act quickly while they had the momentum to do so. The armed workers known as Red Guards and the other revolutionary groups moved on the night of Nov. 6-7 under the orders of the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. These forces seized post and telegraph offices, electric works, railroad stations, and the state bank. Once the shot rang out from the Battleship Aurora, the thousands of people in the Red Guard stormed the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government had officially fallen to the Bolshevik regime. Once the word came to the rest of the people that the Winter Palace had been taken, people from all over rose and filled it. V. I. Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, announced his attempt to construct the socialist order in Russia. This new government made up of Soviets, and led by the Bolsheviks. By early November, there was little doubt that the proletariats backed the Bolshevik motto: "All power to the soviets!"
11. "zhydy" – abusive nickname of Jews in the Soviet Union
12. Great Terror (1934-1938): During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the



notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

13. Armand, Inessa (1874-1920): Revolutionary and Lenin's mistress. She became a member of the illegal Social Democratic Labour Party in Russia in 1903. After a two-year exile in Siberia for distributing illegal propaganda, she settled in Paris in 1910. She met Lenin and other Bolsheviks living in exile and became a close associate of Lenin. She returned to Russia together with Lenin and other Russian revolutionaries in 1917. After the Revolution Armand served as an executive member of the Moscow Soviet. On her return to Petrograd, she became director of Zhenotdel, an organization that fought for female equality in the Communist Party and the trade unions. She died of cholera and was buried in Red Square in a state funeral.

14. Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939): Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

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

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

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

18. Mandatory job assignment upon graduation from higher educational institutions in the former

Soviet Union: according to the Soviet law graduates from institutes were obliged to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by a relevant Institute. Upon completion of this term young people were allowed to get an employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

19. This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of WWII until the late 1980s.

20. The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

21. Yevtushenko, Yevgeny - Popular Russian poet. Born in 1933. Yevtushenko's first book of poems was published in 1952. He soon became the most popular spokesman of the young generation of poets who refused to adhere to the doctrine of socialist realism. The publication in Paris of Yevtushenko's Precocious Autobiography (1963) brought him severe official censure, and he was frequently criticized by the Russian government for his nonconformist attitude. Despite this, he made several reading tours abroad during the Soviet era. He has also written novels. In addition, he is an actor, director, and photographer.

22. Voznesensky Andrei - Popular Russian poet. 1933- Born in Moscow. In 1957 Graduates from Moscow Institute of Architecture; encourages him to pursue writing. Receives attention for first published verses Publishes first collections Parabola and Mosaic, in which all his poetic tropes are evident - polymetric lines, graphic verse, inappropriate rhymes and odd metaphors. 1979 Awarded the State Prize for Poetry; participates in official literary almanac Metropol; 1983 Three volume collection of his works appears in Soviet Union.

23. Anatoli Rybakov - World known Russian writer, the author of the Dirk, Bronze Bird, Children of Arbat, Heavy Sand and many other stories, novels, screenplays and TV serials.

24. Sholem Aleichem, real name was Shalom Nohumovich Rabinovich (1859-1916): Jewish writer. He lived in Russia and moved to the US in 1914. He wrote about the life of Jews in Russia in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian.