

# Sally Uzvalova

Sally Uzvalova

Ukraine

Chernovtsy

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

*Sally Uzvalova is a short slim woman with a straight bearing. She has gray hair neatly cut. Sally is friendly and dignified. Within few minutes of our discussion I felt like we had known each other for a while. She speaks fluent Russia, although her mother tongue is Rumanian and she started learning Russian during the Great Patriotic War. Sally enjoyed giving an interview. She is the only survivor of all members of her family and she hopes that her story will become a monument to all of her relatives that were morally and physically obliterated by the Soviet power. Perhaps someone related to her family will read her story and contact her.*

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## My family background

My grandfather on my father's side Idel Barzak was born in Lodz in 1870s. I have no information about his family. They all stayed in Poland. My grandfather Idel finished Yeshiva in Krakov. He was a cantor. There were no vacancies in the synagogues in Lodz or Krakov and my grandfather was sent to the town of Soroki [Bessarabia, about 1000 km from Krakow]. He was a cantor in the synagogue there for 40 years, until 1940. His wife, my grandmother Hana came from Soroki. My grandmother was the same age as my grandfather.

Before 1918 Soroki belonged to the Russian Empire. In 1918 the town became a part of Rumania. Rumanian language became a state language. It wasn't a problem for local population. As Moldavian was very close to Rumanian. There were slogans in public places: "Please, speak Rumanian". Soroki was a provincial town where the flow of time only left its signs on people, but not on the town itself. It was a small town. There were about 500 Jewish families that constituted about half of population. There was also Moldavian and Russian population. There were no national conflicts in the town. Jews lived in the central part of Soroki. Moldavians were farmers in their majority. They lived in the outskirts of the town. Land was less expensive in the outskirts of the town and they had their farm fields, vineries and orchards. There were few Jewish attorneys, doctors and pharmacists in Soroki. Most of the Jewish population finished cheder (4 years) and were handicraftsmen. Most of the Jewish families were poor. Apart from this all Jews observed all Jewish traditions. There was no theft or adultery among Jewish people. They led a very decent life. However, there were two brothels in Soroki with red lamps on them: one for officers and one for soldiers, but Jews never visited them. There were big Jewish families, there wasn't much space in their dwellings and led a transparent life. Everybody knew everything about their neighbors. All

Jews were religious. In the morning and in the evening all Jews regardless of their profession dressed up to go to pray at the synagogue. There were two synagogues in Soroki – one bigger synagogue in the center of the town and a smaller one – near the Rumanian fortress in the outskirts of the town. Working people went to this smaller synagogue and the richer attended the synagogue in the center. On Friday every family got prepared for Shabbat. On holidays children gathered in the yard of the big two-storied synagogue to listen to the shofar. On holidays all Jews were dressed up. Bearded men wore their clean clothes and black hats. Their wives were housewives for the most part. But some women like my grandmother had to work to support their families. Girls from poor families that didn't have an opportunity to study in grammar schools went to study a profession after finishing Jewish primary school. Girls were dressmakers or embroideresses for the most part.

When my grandfather was not busy at the synagogue he prayed at home and read religious books. I remember him praying with his twiln on his hand and forehead. A cantor must have received a small salary, because my grandmother owned a store to support the family of six members. It was a small store that occupied just one room in the house where the family resided. The store was open from morning till late evening and my grandmother worked there just. She sold essential goods in her store. My grandparents had five sons. The oldest Itzyk was born in 1895. The next one was my father Borukh that was born in 1898. Meyer was born in 1900. Leon (Leib) was born in 1906. Daniel, the youngest son, was born in 1908.

My grandmother's business and my grandfather's salary of a cantor in a synagogue allowed my grandparents to provide for the family, but it was not enough. They lived in a small house. My grandmother and grandfather lived in one room, five boys lived in another and the store was housed in the biggest room. There was a hallway between my grandparents' room and the store where my grandfather had his desk with his accessories for praying and religious books. He prayed in this room. My grandfather was a man of average height. He wore payes and a big beard. He wore a yarmulke at home and a big black hat when he went out. My grandfather was a very nice and kind man. My grandmother was a tall and big woman. She wore long skirts and dark long-sleeved blouses. She always wore a shawl. My grandmother had thick dark hair, but I got an impression that her head was shaved and she wore a wig. When her grandchildren wanted to stroke her hair she never allowed us to do so. Perhaps, she was afraid that we would move her wig. My grandmother was a hardworking and energetic woman.

They celebrated all Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. All members of the family knew Russian, Rumanian and Moldavian, but they spoke Yiddish in the family. On Friday my grandmother lit candles to celebrate Shabbat. I remember Shabbat in my father's family where the tradition of celebrating Shabbat in the parents' house was observed even when the sons were married and lived with their own families. My grandmother was a brilliant cook and always made Gefilte fish, chicken and hala bread at Shabbat. After the prayer the family sat down to festive dinner. My grandmother made food for two days to stay rested on Saturday.

My father and all five children worked very hard. The boys finished cheder (4 years) and after they had to go to work. Their parents couldn't afford to give them education. My father worked at the state tobacco plantation since he was 11. He took a piece of mamalyga (Editor's note: corn pudding) and a clove of garlic or an onion to work. Working hard he made some saving and at 27

he owned a house and two stores. His brothers were also doing well. Leon was my father's partner. He married a Jewish girl from a very poor family. She had no dowry, but she was very pretty. Leon and his wife Liya had a son. Yasha was born in 1933. My father's older brother Itzyk owned a restaurant located in the central street in Soroki. He had 6 children. Meyer owned a big shoe store. He had two children: son Lyova and daughter Bella. Daniel owned a tavern with 6 or 7 tables in it. Moldavian farmers used to drop by for a glass or two of a drink. They could have a snack: marinated herring or pickles made by my grandmother. Daniel was married and had a son.

My mother's family lived in Yassy, Rumania. My grandmother and grandfather came from Yassy. My grandfather Ishye Roitberg was born in 1860s. My grandmother Golda was 2-3 years younger than my grandfather. I didn't know any about my grandparents' families. My grandparents owned a small shop where they made children's clothes and bed sheets. There were 5 or 6 employees working in the shop. My grandmother cut fabrics. She did the cutting at night, so that seamstresses could make lovely pillows, overalls, dresses and baby's loose jackets during a day. I remember blue and red ribbons used as adornments. I liked to play with them.

Yassy are located in Northeastern Rumania near the current border of Rumania with Moldavia. Yassy was a bigger town than Soroki. There were many Jews in Yassy, about 50% population. They were all religious. There were few synagogues in the town. I remember one of them where my grandparents took me when I came to visit them. This was the biggest synagogue, nicely and richly furnished and decorated. My grandfather had a seat of his own on the lower floor and my grandmother had a seat in the upper floor. There was a strong Jewish community in Yassy that made contributions to the synagogue, to support the poor and sickly Jews and even to provide a dowry to orphaned girls or girls from poor families. My grandfather and grandmother were very religious. They celebrated Shabbat and all Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. My grandfather had many books in Hebrew and in Yiddish: religious and classic. He used to read in the evening. My grandparents worked very hard, but they provided well for the family. They had six children: three sons and three daughters.

The oldest son Yankel was born in 1895. The next one was Mark, born in 1899. Their next son Shymon was born in 1902. Then there came three daughters: Fania, born in 1904, my mother Tonia, born in 1906 and the youngest daughter Etia, born in 1911.

The family lived in their own house in the center of Yassy. Their sewing shop was in the same house. The house was big enough: the girls and the boys had rooms, one room belonged to their parents and there was a big living room and a kitchen that served as a dining room on weekdays. At Shabbat and on holidays the family had meals in the living room.

My grandparents spoke Yiddish and the children spoke Rumanian to one another. The boys studied at cheder and the girls had a teacher coming to teach them at home. They studied Hebrew and to read and write in Hebrew and Yiddish. All boys finished a Rumanian lower secondary (8 years) grammar school and continued their studies. Yankel studied in Yeshiva in Bucharest. After finishing the Yeshiva he became a gabba at the synagogue in Bucharest. He was married and had three children. Shymon graduated from Medical Faculty at the Bucharest University. Mark opened his own footwear store in Yassy after finishing a commercial college. They were all married and had children.

All three daughters finished a grammar school. Besides studying general subjects they were taught manners. Men willingly married graduates of this grammar school, as they made good wives and assisted their husbands in business. My mother's sisters married wealthy men. Fania got married in 1927 and Etia - in 1930. Fania's husband Matey Levinzon was a businessman and Etia's husband owned a store.

My grandfather Ishye died in Yassy in 1932. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Yassy in accordance with the Jewish tradition.

In 1923 my father was recruited to serve in the Rumanian army two years. He served in Yassy where he met my mother's older brother Mark. Mark invited my father to his home at weekends. My father met my mother and fell in love with her. It was love at first sight. My mother was a striking beauty when she was young. She became "Miss Yassy" several times. My father asked my grandparents their consent for marrying their daughter. They told him that my mother didn't have a dowry. My father didn't give up and they got engaged. After their engagement my father took my mother to the jewelry store and bought her a golden ring and a watch. This was his first gift to my mother. He was madly in love with her. This was a heavenly love and they kept it through their marriage.

In 1925 after the service term of my father was over, my parents got married. My father was 25 and my mother - 19. They had a wedding party in my mother parents' home. My mother's parents had just completed the construction of an annex to their house where they were going to locate their sewing shop. My parents had their wedding party in this annex. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. The rabbi from a big synagogue conducted the ceremony. There was a big wedding feast after the ceremony. There were many guests. My father's relatives from Soroki came to the wedding. After the wedding my father took his young wife to Soroki. My father didn't have a house. At the beginning my parents rented a house from an old gray-bearded man Volovskiy.

## **Growing up**

In some time my father purchased that plot of land from him and built two big houses. He started construction of the 2nd house after I was born. I was born on 14 October 1927. I was named Sarah, but I mispronounced the sound "r" in my childhood saying "Sally" instead of "Sarah". Everybody started calling me "Sally". My father wanted me to live nearby after I got married and built a 2nd house near his own house. The 2nd house had big Venetian windows: my father saw them when he was in Rumania. He used to joke that if my mother didn't let my admirers in, they would enter the house through the windows. We didn't have a stove. My father built a modern house without a stove. There was no water supply or sewerage in Soroki. We had a big tank of water in the attic supplying water to the bathrooms, toilets and the kitchen. When the Soviet power was established in 1940 both houses were nationalized. They house a museum of weapons now.

There were room maids in our family. I had a room maid of my own. My mother helped my father to do business. She started to work in my father's fabric store. My father was accounting and purchase manager of the store. In each store there were 2-3 employed shop assistants that were Jews. My mother supervised the shop assistant and advised her customers on what to select. Many people came to the store to take a look at the beautiful wife of Borukh Barzak. And they bought more from the store. My mother helped my father in many ways. My father always listened

to my mother's advice about the fabrics to purchase. My mother often arranged dinner for his business partners when they came to Soroki. It was very good for my father's business to demonstrate that he managed his business and his household with efficiency.

My father came home for lunch. I tried to finish my lunch quickly, because then my father rode me on my sleighs for about an hour and we both enjoyed being outside in the fresh air. My father loved me dearly. When I grew older he often took me on his business trips. I was very happy to spend time with my father.

My father was a very kind and honest man. Older Jews called him "a giter id" – a good Jew in Yiddish. Other people often came to ask my father's advice. One of his clerks was to go to serve in the army. There was a possibility to pay a redemption fee to save a recruit for service in the army. The fee was equal to the price of a horse. My father paid this price for the man and the clerk continued his work in the store. Another clerk's sister was getting married and had no dowry. My father gave her shoes, underwear and clothes that he had in his store. His clerks were Jewish people.

My father loved his parents. Before going to buy goods in Bucharest or other towns he went to ask my grandmother's Jewish blessing. When he returned he went to see his parents and give them gifts that he brought from his trips. He had to pass our house, as his parents lived farther from the railway station and I often saw him going past his home to see them.

My mother always wore beautiful clothes that my father brought from Bucharest. My father and mother were a very handsome couple. They were different, though. My mother was a very educated woman, while my father just finished cheder. My mother taught him to clothe with taste and good manners. They used to dress up in the evening and go to the synagogue hand in hand. I don't remember them arguing. My father was a very smart businessman and a good family man. He always tried to please his beloved wife. When he went to make purchases he loaded what he bought himself saving on loaders and bought big boxes of chocolates for my mother that cost 500 lei each. This was a lot of money at the time. My mother ate a box of chocolate in one evening. I tried to finish my lunch as soon as I could and my father took me out to toboggan. When I grew up my father took me with him when he went on business trips. We enjoyed spending time together.

My father and mother were very religious. My father had a seat near the Eastern wall at the synagogue and my mother had a seat on the upper floor. My father made charity contributions and took care of some poor families giving them money to buy matsah for the holidays. My father made contributions to the synagogue. The synagogue provided food products to poor families to celebrate Pesach. They bought clothes for the needy families. But every Jew had special clothes for go to synagogue. However poor they might have been every man had a black suit, kippah and a black hat and woman had fancy gowns. My mother also put on a fancy dress and they went to the synagogue holding hands. When my father came home from work in the evening he put on a suit of fine cloth, white shirt and a tie and a black hat. We spoke Rumanian at home. I only heard Yiddish when I visited my grandparents.

My parents followed the kashrut. We also had kosher utensils for dairy and meat products for everyday use. I remember washing my hands in the sink when some foam splashed onto a casserole. The soap was not kosher! It was a tragedy. I was told to get out of the kitchen and was

not allowed to come in there for quite some time. My mother took the casserole outside, because it wasn't kosher any more. My mother had special dishes and kitchen utensils for Pesach. She took her everyday dishes and utensils to the attic for the whole period of Pesach. We always had matsah at Pesach. My mother had a Jewish cook that made traditional Jewish food and baked traditional cookies. She made gefilte fish and chicken at Shabbat. Halas were delivered to rich houses. Poorer people made hala bread by themselves. We had ridges filled with ice. Ice was placed in the upper part where there was a tube water drain. Every morning a big piece of ice wrapped in hay was delivered to our house. My father cut it into smaller pieces and sprinkled with salt to prevent it from melting. My father liked to do shopping himself. He got up at 5am to go to the market to buy the best chicken, cottage cheese and everything else. He opened his store after he returned from the market. My father always bought live chickens. Our cook brought the chickens to the shoihet. There was a Jewish butcher's shop selling kosher veal and beef.

We often went to visit my grandparents on Jewish holidays. There was a rule in the family that the sons and their families celebrated Shabbat and holidays in their parents' home. At Shabbat my grandmother lit candles and said a prayer over them. My grandmother baked halas, made Gefilte fish and strudels. My grandmother said a prayer over the candles and then we all prayed for health and wealth of all members of the family. Children also participated in prayers. Then the family sat at the table. Men drank a little vodka in small silver glasses and women drank a little bit of wine. Then we had a festive dinner. My parents went to the synagogue on Saturday. The cook made food for Saturday on Friday. She baked buns with chicken fat and cracklings, made stew with meat and potatoes and made various tsymes dishes. She left the food in the oven to keep it warm until the following day. Stores were closed on Saturday. On this day our father read us a section from the Torah and in the evening we often had guests. A Moldavian man came to light the lamp and stake the stove. He was paid for this service.

At Pessach the whole family was going to in parental house. They put a big table in a bigger room to have the whole family sit at the table. The sons came with their wives and children. There was traditional food for Pesach on the table: Gefilte fish, chicken broth, matsah and potato puddings and most delicious strudels, salt water, greeneries and bitter horseradish. Salt water symbolized tears of Jews and horseradish – bitterness of the Jewish slavery in Egypt. The greeneries were dipped in salt water and eaten. My grandfather conducted the Seder. One of his grandsons asked him traditional questions. We followed all traditions, as my grandfather was a cantor at the synagogue.

My father's brothers had children and we were all very close. We often came to see our grandparents. Our grandmother was always happy to see her grandchildren. Our grandfather always prayed when he was at home. Sometimes we took advantage of the situation running into his store to grab a lollypop or something else. Our grandfather couldn't reprimand us because he couldn't say a word during his prayers. He only murmured "M-m-m", but couldn't punish us for what we did. There was a tray with a small silver glass of vodka and a piece of leikech – honey cake. After the prayer our grandfather dipped a piece of leikech into vodka and sucked it. Our grandfather was very proud of his sons and hoped that his grandchildren would also be a success in life.



In 1933 my mother gave birth to a boy. He was named Oscar. His Jewish name was Ishye after my mother's father. The whole town was invited to the ritual of circumcision. There was a big table with gifts for children in the middle of the yard. There were 300 packages with candy and fruit. There was a violinist playing and there was much joy that a son was born.

When I turned 7 my parents sent me to the French grammar school in Yassy. I stayed in the boarding school. This grammar school was founded by French nuns and they were also teachers at the school. We studied all subject in Rumanian. There were quite a few Jewish girls in the grammar school. My mother and her sisters also studied at this grammar school. The fee to pay for my studies was rather high, but my father was sure that he would be able to provide for me.

I was to study 12 years at the grammar school: 4 years of primary school and 8 years of grammar school. We studied all general subjects plus embroidery, sewing rules of conduct, music, reception of guests, ethics and esthetics. The nuns wore long black skirts with white stripes and always had books of prayers in their hands. All nuns had finished closed higher educational institutions for girls and had at least the level of B.S. During classes there was silence in the building of the school. We had uniform of our school.

We were taught to respect older people. We were taught to be honest and kind to people. These nuns taught me the basics of morale and ethics. I was a spoiled girl from a wealthy family. My father expressed his love to me with gifts, but he couldn't spend enough time with me to teach me what I needed to know. I've lived my life according to the principles that I learned from the nuns. We were taught to evaluate our behavior and to be critical to it. Every morning nuns called the names of the girls and each was supposed to evaluate her behavior during a previous day based on the 10-grade scale. The nuns were watching us and took notice of our misconduct to check how objective we were in our evaluations. We were also supposed to speak nicely to guests and be well mannered and reserved. We were to move in a nice manner and bear ourselves decently. The girls were prepared to be a wife, a mother and mistress of the house. We studied to play the piano, sing and dance.

Jewish girls arranged charity concerts and invited our families to attend them. The money that we collected selling tickets was spent to buy clothes for girls from poor Jewish families at Pesach. Pupils of other faith arranged charity concerts to contribute the money to poor families of their faith. We were taught to help less fortunate people. We celebrated all religious holidays at the boarding school. Jewish girls learned to celebrate Shabbat and light candles. We celebrated Pesach, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and Purim. Jewish girls also studied the rules of kashrut where we learned to make a menu for different occasions, cook and lay the table.

We had mandatory classes of religion - separate for believers representing different religions. The Rumanian government respected the right of national minorities to study their own language. We were taught to respect somebody else's religion. A rabbi came to teach Jewish girls Hebrew and Yiddish. We had a special classroom for our classes. Catholic church and Christian pupils had their religious classes too.

There were rich libraries with a big collection of books in Yiddish translated into Rumanian. Jewish rules were well respected in the grammar school. Religion played the main role in the life of every family.

After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 fascist organizations appeared in Rumania. For some period of time the Rumanian police didn't stop their anti-Semitic attacks, but when the organization of kuzists (1) intended to usurp the power gendarmes shot kuzists in all Rumanian towns. They didn't execute all of them, but it became a warning to all other fascists and they quieted down.

In 1940 the USSR declared an ultimatum to Rumania demanding Bessarabia and Moldavia. My father realized that the situation was rowing severe and came to Yassy to take me home. I had finished primary school and was in the 2nd year of secondary school. My grandmother Golda was terrified and begged my father to move to Rumania. My grandmother invited some Russians that had emigrated from Russia in 1918 that told my father about the horror of the Soviet power. However, my father was convinced that his children would reach more in the Soviet country than in Rumania. He said that he was young and strong and he could go to work. We had a German radio at home - «Telefunken». My father knew Russian and often listened to broadcast from the USSR. He believed the Soviet propaganda about equal rights and friendship between all nations, the right to labor and rest and social justice. He thought that in the Soviet country he wouldn't have to worry about supporting his family because the state would take care of many issues. My father strongly refused from moving to Rumania. When I was leaving the boarding school the nuns told me something that imprinted on my memory and stayed there forever: "Girl, we are sorry that you are leaving, because there can be no good in the country where people don't believe in God. There is no other truth on the Earth but faith in the God. Please remember what we've taught you and stick to these rules in life".

We arrived at Soroki and on the next day the Soviet army came to the town. This happened on 28 June 1940. The stores sold out their stocks. In three days NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) arrested my father and his brother and partner Leon, as "socially dangerous elements". They were considered "dangerous" to the society, because they were co-owners of a store with hired employees that meant that they were "exploiters" in terms of the Soviet power. My father and Leon were put in jail and then they were sentenced to 8 years in a high security camp. Shortly after the trial my father and Leon were sent to Siberia along with thieves, bandits and other criminals. My grandfather Idel, cantor, couldn't bear it. He died of a heart attack. The synagogue that was still functioning helped my grandmother to bury my grandfather according to the Jewish tradition at the Jewish cemetery in Soroki. Before he died my grandfather told his grandchildren that he had buried his favorite picture in the basement of the house. There was an old Jew reading a book painted in that picture. The Jew had a handsome face and beautiful face. My grandfather believed this picture to be holy and didn't want anyone who didn't believe in God to have it. He asked us to get this picture when we grew up.

After my father was arrested there was a search in our house. The Soviet representatives took all our valuables into a big room and sealed the door. Among NKVD representatives that arrested my father and then did the search was Itzkevich, a Jewish man. Later this man stayed to live in one of our houses along with his Jewish wife. He came from Donbass. For some reason he felt sorry for my mother. He told her that he would go to lunch and leave the sealed door open for her to take what she needed from this room and then he would seal the door again. He addressed my mother "Madam" instead of "Comrade" that was typical for Soviet authorities. My mother said that all she wanted to have were golden coins hidden in the cornice and a box with her jewelry. I don't



remember how I got to the cornice, but I managed to get these coins. We buried them in the basement near the picture. Later that Itskevich man gave us a letter from our father (he was in the camp in Solikamsk) that was delivered to the NKVD office like all mail from prisons and camps. In this letter my father was telling us that he was sent to Solikamsk in the former Molotov region. He was very concerned about us and begged us to forgive us for his crucial mistake leading to such critical situation. After imprisonment of my father and a search in the house the Soviet authorities left us alone.

My father's other brothers didn't have hired employees and had no problems with the Soviet authorities for some time. Meyer and his wife worked in a store and Itzyk also worked. Daniel, the younger son, his wife and their son lived in a room in their parents' house. They made wine for the tavern and my grandmother made herring with onions and pickles for snacks.

Our first year in the soviet regime was terrifying for us. We were in expectation of something to happen. We didn't know Russian and couldn't listen to the radio or read newspapers. There was tension hanging in the air like before a storm. At the beginning of June 1941 the local authorities ordered villagers from neighboring villages to come to the central square with their horse-driven carts. They were told to wait for directions to come. It was a cold and rainy summer. The farmers slept on their carts wrapped in heavy coats and wrapped their horses in horsecloths and blankets. This lasted for 3 days.

On the night of 12 June the silence exploded in women's screaming and children's wailing. Richer people and people with average income were taken out of their houses and onto the carts. They didn't get a chance to take any luggage with them. The carts moved in the direction of the railway station in Floreshty where trains were waiting for them. I can still remember the tapping of horseshoes on the cobbly pavements of Soroki. It lasted for about 24 hours. People were afraid of looking out of the window or leaving their home. On this day all other members of the family were sent in exile as suspicious elements: my grandmother, my father's brothers and their families. On 15 June 1941 (editor's note; 6 days before the beginning of the Great patriotic War) all these people were put on a train with barred windows at the railway station in Floreshty. Inhabitants of Floreshty came to the station to give some food to people on the train, but the convoy took this food away. The train headed to Mogochino village of Krasnoyarsk region, Siberia, in 3500 km from their home. The village was fenced with barbed wire and patrol dogs guarded the area. Every day an orderly called the roll. They lived in dugout houses that they excavated by themselves for two years before barracks were built. Town people were dying, as they were not adjusted to the severe conditions of the cold climate. Men went to work at the wood throw. The ones that failed to complete a standard scope were deprived of their miserable ration of food that they also shared with their families. My grandmother and her son's wives dug out mice holes and made soup with nettle and mouse meat. They starved to death, swell from hunger, had their feet and hands frost bitten. In 1942 the older brother Itzyk, his wife and 6 children died. They were buried in a common grave and there was no gravestone installed or no other indication of their personalities. Their exile was for an indefinite period of time. Only in 1980, in 40 years' time the survivors were allowed to return, but they were not allowed to reside in bigger towns. However, they all stayed in Mogochino. Meyer went to exile with his wife Golda and two children: Leo, 14 years old and Bella that was 9 years old. Their children grew up and got married and had children of their own. Meyer loved his wife dearly. He was a tall handsome man and Golda was a short slim woman. Meyer died in 1980s,

shortly after his wife. We have no information about their children. Daniel went to exile with his beautiful wife Eva and their 6-year-old son. They had another child in exile. Eva died in 1988 and Daniel - in 1992.

The only Jewish whore of Soroki, a beautiful woman, was also sent to exile. The Soviet power treated whores and wealthy people in a similar manner. Her mother made kvass (Russian drink made from bread and yeast) for sale. They were a poor family and the girl went to work in the brothel for officers when she turned 15. When she was to go in exile her mother couldn't understand why she was sent away - in her opinion she was a working woman! In the camp the woman worked for the guards of the camp. She returned to Soroki after the war wearing a fur coat and golden rings. She told us the story of our relatives, as correspondence with inmates of the camp was not allowed.

### During the war

On 22 June 1941 the Great Patriotic war began (2). At night the Rumanian and German troops came close to Soroki. The town was not bombed, but planes flew to the East over the town. A local farmer that knew and respected my father came to tell us that Germans exterminated Jews and that we should better leave the town. He took us across the Dnestr that was the territory of Ukraine and put us on a train. We decided to go to Solikamsk where my father was. When the train stopped I got off to run to a nearest village to exchange my mother's pieces of jewelry for food. Once I saw that my train started when I was coming to the station. I don't know how I managed to catch it, but I didn't drop the food that I had. There was a conductor on the stairs to the last railcar that grabbed me.

After covering about 1000 km we arrived at a village in Stalingrad region that belonged to Povolzhiye Germans (3) that had been deported. We stayed in their houses. We needed to move down the Volga River, but it froze and we had to wait. We seemed to have been forgotten by the authorities. There were no jobs and shops, offices and schools were closed. We stayed there until autumn 1942. We didn't have any clothes with us. Our neighbor made me some kind of underwear from an old military overcoat. My mother was a phlegmatic person and my brother took after her. They didn't take an effort to change things. I take after my father. I was the only one that could get things. I knew firmly that I had to take care of my family. My mother and brother were swollen from lack of food and indifferent. I went to the market to exchange my mother's rings and earrings for bread and sugar. I have the hardest memories of that period. It was the period of famine when bread was released for coupons. Bread was delivered to a store in a two-tier box on a cart. I stood in long lines. The ration of bread was 300 grams for dependants, 400 grams for clerks and 500 grams for workers. One young man desperate from hunger came to the cart from an opposite side, opened the hook and stole a loaf of bread. He started running when people standing in line saw him and began to chase after him. He managed to finish this loaf of bread while running, but the crowd caught up with him and beat him to death.

When ice on the river melted down we moved on. We sailed 500 km to Astrakhan on a freight barge. We had to stop there, as my brother and mother were too weak to even walk. We were accommodated at the "Rodina" [Motherland in Russian] in Astrakhan. It was overcrowded. There were about 3.5 thousand people accommodated there. There were only 221 survivors by spring next year. Children and adults were dying and their bodies were dumped in the foyer of the

cinema theater. Every morning a truck came to take away the corpses. People had lice. I didn't know about lice before. I ran to get some boiled water, food and sugar. Later I got ill with typhoid and was taken to a hospital. I survived there by miracle. My mother came to take me away one day and the next night the hospital was destroyed by bombing. Nobody survived. During one of raids a splinter injured my cheek. The wound didn't heal and festered. I could touch my gum through the wound.

My mother couldn't speak Russian. Somebody felt sorry for her and she got a job at the hospital. She was attendant at a surgery room and I assisted her. I remember how we removed amputated arms and legs from the surgery room and stored them in a shed. The 3 of us were accommodated in a small room in the hospital. We slept on heaps of hay on the floor.

I had beautiful handwriting. We practiced a lot at the grammar school. At that time all typewriters were removed from offices. I wrote all reports and documents at the hospital. I had my face bandaged. I had it washed with manganese solution in hospital and bandaged with gauze dipped in manganese solution. This gauze got dry and stuck to the wound and on the next day when I came to have it dressed the nurse tore the old dressing off to replace it. I weighed about 30 kg when I was 15 years old. Manager of the hospital told my mother that I needed to have enough food to heal the injury. But where were we to get this food. Once I came to the railway station. There was a train with prisoners-of-war that were allowed to take a breath of fresh air. They were Rumanian prisoners-of-war. I got so happy (I didn't understand they were enemies). I ran to them asking "Gentlemen, where do you come from?" They were stunned to hear me speaking their mother tongue. They went back on the train and dropped me a bag full of food from the train. I couldn't lift this bag and I lay on it. There was butter, tinned meat and fish, dried bread and chocolate and other food. I stayed there for a while. I was in the state of shock and couldn't move. Later I dragged this bag home. My mother was at work in the hospital. I put a little butter onto the gauze and applied it to the wound. In the morning the wound miraculously closed and the wound began to heal.

During the raids I begged the Lord to let a bomb hit a train with food for the front. After the raids many people came to the railway station hoping to find food. Those that were stronger managed to get more, but I also managed to grab something that I brought home. I went to school, but I worked as a cleaning girl there. I also listened to teachers and began to learn Russian. I also cleaned the office of director of the school and she gave me a bowl of sour milk. She allowed me to read other pupils' notebooks. Once she asked me to make a stove in a pigsty. I mixed cow manure with straw and dried pieces of this mixture in the sun. I didn't know how to make a stack and I made a stove with two openings (like the ones I saw in a German village in Povolzhiye). I got a bowl of sour milk and a loaf of bread for this work. I gave this food to my mother and brother.

We didn't observe any traditions during the war. There were hardly any Jews in our encirclement. We were just trying hard to survive. We never thought that we were not allowed to work on Saturday or that we had to celebrate. Besides, we were so intimidated by the Soviet reality that we were afraid to even mention any Jewish holidays or traditions.

In 1944 a part of Bessarabia was liberated. At the end of 1944 we obtained a permit to go to Reshetilovka station in Ukraine. Local authorities dictated destination points at their own discretion. They tried to keep people that previously resided at the areas that joined the Soviet Union shortly

before the war. We – me and my mother and brother went back on open platforms. We had no luggage. When our train stopped on a station I got off the train and entered an office at the railway station. I saw a pen in an inkpot on the desk and changed the name of Reshetilovka to Floreshty in our ticket. It worked however surprising it might be. We were going on a military train heading for Rumania. We arrived at Soroki. Our acquaintances couldn't recognize us. When I said I was the daughter of Barzak they got scared because I looked more like a ghost. I had a coat made from a uniform overcoat, address made from a military shirt and boots made from heavy woolen boots.

### After the war

We got to know that Liya, ex-wife of Leon was in Soroki. We went to her house and she took us in. I went to our former house and got a box with golden coins from the basement. I put them in my boot. Liya's father, a religious man, that attended the synagogue twice a day, saw me hiding them and took it away. When I complained to Liya he told me to keep my mouth shut or we would all go to where my father was. So we found the coins – and we lost them. I have no idea what he did with this money or whether it brought him what he wanted.

In Soroki we heard what happened to my father. At the end of 1944 he committed suicide at the wood throw in Siberia. He couldn't bear the thought that he had made a wrong choice and ruined his family when he didn't follow my grandmother's advice. My father wrote a farewell letter sending it to the town hall of Soroki. I don't know whether this letter would have reached us if it hadn't been for a woman from Soroki that used to be my room maid that had worked at the town hall since 1940. She gave us the letter. My father wrote: "I destroyed my family and there is no forgiveness for me. I have my hands and feet frost-bitten and I've become an invalid at 42. I don't know whether members of my family are alive, but if they are please send them this letter". After sending this letter my father put his head under a circular saw at the wood cutting site. It was a typical method of suicide in the camp. My father was buried in a common grave that was a usual burial site for inmates of the camp.

When I heard that Liya was getting married I told her that Leon was alive. She replied that I was too young and didn't know much about life. She married a Jewish man, invalid of the war, and lived with him and Leon's son.

In May 1945 the war was over. People told my mother that she could move to Rumania. The borders were open and many people left for Rumania. Me and my mother and brother arrived in Chernovtsy on October 1945 to move to Rumania from there. But right before our departure the border was closed. We were offered to cross the border illegally for some fee, but we didn't have money and feared the Soviet power much. We didn't take the risk of finding ourselves in Siberia instead of Rumania and settled down in Chernovtsy. I began fighting for our survival. We rented a small room in an old Jewish neighborhood. I got a job of assistant accountant at a canteen. I was allowed to have a bowl of soup and take two home, for my work. Later I went to work as an accountant at the textile factory and the three of us could move to the hostel of the factory. There was a big wooden trestle bed in the middle of our room with straw on it. My mother and I slept on the sides and my brother slept between us. There was terrible famine in Chernovtsy in 1945-46. When I managed to get a glass of flour we added a spoon of flour to a glass of boiling water sprinkling it with salt and that was our meal. My co-employees felt sorry for me. Once I got 3 m of cheap fabric for jerky sweaters. I sold it to villagers or exchanged for food. My brother went to the

first form. He was growing up fast and was always hungry. When he was in the 3rd form he helped some pupil with mathematic receiving a bowl of soup for his efforts.

Our acquaintances told us what happened to our relatives. The husband of my mother's sister Etia turned out to be a gambler and womanizer. Etia divorced him before the war and returned to her parents' home. When the war began Etia and her mother stayed home. They perished in their house during an air raid in 1942. My mother's older sister Fania, her husband and their children moved to Israel after the war. Life conditions were severe at that time – lack of food, malaria, etc. Fania and her husband died in early 1950s. We have no information about their children, as well as about my mother's brothers.

In 1946 uncle Leon came to visit us. He was stay in the camp for two more years after our father death. In 1945 he was allowed to settle down in a village instead of the camp and he could also visit his family and spend a month with us. At first Leon went to Soroki where he got to know that his wife had remarried. She didn't even want to talk with him. Leon came to Chernovtsy. He was struck with grief. We talked and cried with him a whole night. He was very sorry that he couldn't anything for us, as he had to go back to Siberia. Uncle Leon stayed in Siberia. He worked as an accountant and died in 1966. He was buried at the town cemetery in Solikamsk.

We didn't observe any Jewish traditions after the war. My cousins that went to Siberia and we were afraid of going to synagogue or celebrating Shabbat and Jewish holidays at home. Like weaning a baby from breastfeeding everything Jewish was cut away from us. The only thing that stayed with us was our language. During the Soviet power there were people in Chernovtsy that got together in secret to pray. Only old people that had nothing to fear went to the synagogue. This fear of the Soviet power was with us for a lifetime. My mother always went to the other side of the street when she saw a militiaman. She was always afraid of hearing someone knocking on the door. Although she was good at languages she failed to learn Russian – I guess it was because of her fear. She lived until the end of her life knowing that the Soviet power put an end to everything good that she had in life. Struggle against cosmopolites in 1948 added to our fears (4). This was open persecution of Jews. My mother was afraid to discuss this subject even in whisper. She concealed her past and I never mentioned my wealthy and well-to-do family when I was applying for a job. I worked on two enterprises, 20 years at each of them. I was afraid of changing a job, even if I was offered better conditions and better salary. I was afraid of having to fill up questionnaires answering questions about my parents or relatives abroad. I never mentioned my relatives in Siberia or Rumania. I had no past and no relatives – I was an incubatory person. The Soviet way of life remained alien to me – I didn't know my rights and I didn't even know that I could apply for getting an apartment.

In 1949 I got married. My co-employee, foreman at the factory, introduced me to my future husband. When he told me that a friend of his wanted to meet me I asked him whether he was a Jewish man. I couldn't ever imagine even dating a non-Jewish man. I was a very shy girl. My mother continuously repeated to me that the only dowry I had was my honor. I invited the two men to my home. Other young men got scared off by my living conditions and nobody wanted to take responsibility for an additional burden – my mother and my brother. I was a breadwinner in the family; there was no one else to take care of them. They came to meet my mother and brother.

My future husband's name was Jacob Uzvalov. His real name was Oswald. I don't know how and when he changed his last name. Jacob was born to a religious Jewish family in Bendery (a



Rumanian town at that time) in 1920. His mother's name was Molka and his father's name was Jacob. Jacob's father was Molka's 2nd husband. She had two sons with her first husband. They were much older than Jacob. Her first husband died and in 1918 she married Jacob Oswald, a very nice man. He was also a widower and was about 50 years old. His two sons and a daughter moved to America in 1930s. In 1920 Molka's husband and her old sons fell ill with typhoid. The boys recovered, but Jacob died. His son Jacob was born after his father died. In 1923 Molka got married again. She gave birth to a son in 1924 and became a widow again before the war. Her last name in her 3rd marriage was Finkel. In 1943 her younger son perished at the front. Her older sons went to work in Rumania and stayed to live there. Jacob entered a professional school in Bucharest. He became an elevator mechanic and got a job at the government house. Jacob loved his mother. In 1944 Jacob moved to Bendery from Bucharest. His mother's house was ruined by bombing and the locals took away whatever was left. Jacob and his mother moved to Chernovtsy and Jacob got a job at the railcar depot. Before the war my husband corresponded with his stepbrothers from America. They wrote that although they didn't know him he was still their brother and they invited him to visit them in the US. After the war their correspondence stopped. When in Bucharest Jacob got fond of the communist ideas and even distributed flyers. It happened somehow that all communists in Rumania were Jews and Rumanians didn't care about communist ideas. Jewish young people got inspired by communist ideas hearing that life was almost a paradise in the USSR. Jacob joined the communist Party when he came to the soviet Union. He was always a convinced communist.

After visiting us Jacob sent us a portable stove on the next day. It was staked by coal and the stack was adjusted to the flue. He also sent half a ton of coal and a bag of potatoes. My mother got very scared asking me what he wanted from us. It took Jacob some time to explain to her that he just wanted to help us. Gradually my mother began to trust him. On 30 April 1949 we got married. We just had a civil ceremony in the district registry office. We didn't have a wedding party, because we were so poor. After our wedding I moved in with Jacob. His mother was very kind to me and I came to liking this plain kind woman. Molka was a religious woman. She observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated Shabbat and all Jewish holidays. She kept it to herself and only her closest people knew about her religiosity. Molka didn't go to synagogue. She prayed at home. She strictly and quietly observed Jewish traditions. I joined her and felt like coming back to my happy blissful childhood. We couldn't always afford a chicken and Gefilte fish on holiday, but there was always matsah at Pesach. My mother-in-law made it herself. We didn't go to synagogue, because my husband was a communist and at best it might result in his having to quit the party. Molka had a book of prayers and we prayed at home.

When I got pregnant my husband got scared. We were very poor and he tried to convince me that we couldn't afford a baby. Molka felt that there was something wrong. She interfered and thanks to her interference I had a son born on 6 June 1951. We named him Boris after my father. We lived from hand to mouth. I didn't have diapers and wrapped my son in newspapers. My mother-in-law was very happy to have a grandson. My husband was afraid of having his son circumcised. My mother thought it was all right, but my mother-in-law insisted on circumcision. Her son said to her "Mother, do you want me to go to jail?" Yes, we were living in constant fear. Regretfully, Molka didn't see her grandson growing. The next year at Pesach she was making matsah. It was hot and her blood pressure got higher, but she didn't stop her work. Molka had a stroke. She died on the first day of Pesach in a week's time in 1952. I insisted that she was buried at the Jewish cemetery,



but my husband was afraid of it.

I took Stalin's death in 1953 easy. For those that were born during the Soviet power Stalin was an icon and an idol, but for me he was a criminal and an embodiment of all evil that Soviet power brought to our family. Everything about the USSR stirred an inner protest in me. I never talked about it, but it lived deep in my soul. There is still fire burning inside me and it will never die. It is pain for my loved ones, for my family that was destroyed physically and morally. After XX Party Congress (5), in 1960s I received a letter from KGB where they wrote that my father was completely rehabilitated and that it was all a mistake made in his regard. So simple...

I tried to raise my son a Jew. In 1954 during census my 3-year-old son asked me to write his nationality as Russian. When I asked him why he wanted to do so he said "Because Russians are good and Jews are not. That's what children say in the yard". I was horrified to hear this, but I began to explain to him that Jews were smart, talented and intelligent people. I read to him books by Jewish authors and told him about actors, musicians and scientists. He gradually came to knowing the history of Jewish people. He began to study Hebrew and Yiddish. It was only possible to do this in secret at that time to avoid accusations in Zionism and Jewish chauvinism. Such accusation might result in arrest and exile. My son was very good at singing. After my mother-in-law died we stopped celebrating Jewish holidays. We worked on Saturdays and Jewish holidays were also working days. My husband was against religion. However, our son was inspired by the Jewish way of life and I didn't interfere with him. When my son studied at school I took him to Soroki to show him my hometown. We went to the museum that was my former home. The janitor of the museum recognized me exclaiming "here's the mistress of the house!" I didn't remember her, although we were the same age. I asked her to let me show my son around the house during lunch interval. She left for lunch and I took my son to the basement. While she was away we managed to dig out my grandfather's picture. Later, when my son grew up he restored the picture. After he died I gave the picture to Hased in memory of my family and my son.

My husband and I were extremes. He was a communist and I was a former "bourgeois" woman, but we got along well, because political subjects were a taboo in our family. It was the only subject that might cause argument in the family and we didn't touch it. My husband didn't even show me his Party membership card, so sacred his ideas were to him.

My son was 14 when something happened that imprinted on our life. He went to the synagogue with his friends. The very fact of it might become grounds for accusations, but he also talked to foreign tourists in English. At that time any contacts with foreigners were suppressed by KGB [State Security Committee] had their informers in all organizations, even KGB. KGB called my son for interrogations for a whole year. They were trying to make him their informer, but my son didn't agree. He signed a non-disclosure document that obliged him to keep a secret the subject of their discussions. We got to know about it later. After a year my son was left alone. He finished school and served in the army in Kamenets-Podolskiy. After his service in the army our son entered electro technical college there. Upon graduation he returned to Chernovtsy.

In 1970s Jews began to move to Israel. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to change my life. My mother and son also were for leaving the USSR. But we faced resistance of my husband. We tried to convince him to change his mind, but it was in vain. Perhaps, men in our family are doomed to make wrong decisions that destroy them and their families.

In 1970s I went to work at the Regional Fuel Department dealing with gas and coal. I was Deputy Chief accountant. I retired from there 20 years later. I didn't face any anti-Semitism at work. I was an only Jewish employee. I was sociable and friendly. However, I faced anti-Semitism on a state level when I came to the Human Resources Department to ask them to appoint me to the vacant position of Chief accountant whose duties I actually performed. Human resources manager told me firmly that firstly, I was not a member of the party and secondly, I was a Jew. And he added "Your husband hasn't been appointed to the position of manager of depot, has he?" My husband, however, faced anti-Semitism expressed by his co-workers. Although he got along well with them every morning, when he came to work he saw "zhyd, it's time for you to retire" written on his desk or something similar. They might not greet a Jew with birthday, although it was a tradition to greet every employee on his birthday. Now everything is different on the outside, but I believe there is an anti-Semite in every non-Jew. Only fools and drunken people express it while smart people try to hide it.

In 1975 my son worked as electrician at the factory. He was called to KGB again. They wanted to turn him into an informer and threatened that they would put him in jail if he refused to cooperate with them. My son came home pale and upset and refused from eating. I was worried and thought that he was suffering from unhappy love. It never occurred to me that it was something else that troubled him. Once my husband and I began to ask him about what was the matter with him and he told us the truth. My husband was very angry and said that the next time when my son was called to that office he was going with him. He believed that being a member of the Party he could talk to KGB on equal grounds. How naïve he was! He went to that office and my son and I were waiting for him at home. My husband came home and said that at first the KGB officers got angry that our son broke his obligation for non-disclosure of the information. They said that they would have to teach our son what we failed to teach him. Then they told my husband that they knew where he worked and that they also knew that once he laughed at a Party meeting. Then my husband got an idea and he said that he knew who their informer was at his work. The KGB officer that was talking with him yelled at him "Don't you dare to touch that man!" and my husband replied "Then leave my son alone". The KGB stopped pestering my son, but fear crawled into his heart, like it did into mine and my husband's.

Boris married a Jewish girl. I was very happy for him and couldn't wait to become a grandmother. But this marriage cost my son a life. He was told that his wife was unfaithful to him. My son found out that it was true. He was so shocked that he had a stroke. My son was paralyzed for few years. I was taking care of him trying to soothe his suffering. He died on 4 April 1988 when he was 36 years old. The Jewish cemetery was closed and we buried him at the cemetery of Chernovtsy and installed a gravestone on his grave.

My brother Oscar's life ended tragically. He graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute and got a job assignment at the TV factory "Electron" in Lvov. He was among developers of the first modified TV sets that replaced tube TVs. My brother was married to a very nice Jewish girl named Rita. They had a daughter – Sabina. Rita studied at the Medical Institute. They were very poor and lived in one room. Oscar decided that they would move to Israel. He went on tour to Israel to make an acquaintance with the country. There he took a bus tour. Terrorists installed a bomb in the bus and there were no survivors after the bus was blasted. This happened in 1980. His wife and daughter live in Lvov.

After our son died I tried to talk my husband into moving to Israel. One of her stepbrothers on his mother's side and his five children lived in Israel. He found my husband and sent us an invitation. I begged my husband to agree telling him that our son had died and it would be good to reunite with our relatives. And again my husband refused, because he was afraid to leave familiar places.

In 1990 my mother got very ill. She was paralyzed and we had to move her to our home. She lived 3 years and died in November 1993. We buried her near my son's grave. Then my husband got ill. He was suffering for a long time. He died on 2 September 1996. No member of my family was buried according to the Jewish tradition.

I am alone of my big family. The only thing I have is a place at the cemetery and I hope to be buried between my husband and my son.

Many things have changed in Ukraine in the recent ten years. I wish my close ones had lived to see restoration of the Jewish life. Hesed helps me with food and medications. I often attend lectures and meetings in Hesed. It gives me strength to go on. But Hesed cannot replace my family for me. I am not feeling well and I am losing sight. I wish there was someone to tend to me, but I am alone. I only pray to God to take me promptly when my time comes.

## Glossary

1. Cuzists – members of the fascist organization in Rumania in 1931-44 named after Cuza Alexandru (1820-73), Prince of a Rumanian principality in 1862-66, in 1859 Moldova and Valahia became his principalities. He was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. Dismissed and banned in 1944 after Rumania was liberated from fascists.
2. On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.
3. Stalin's policy, forced deportation of the Middle Asian people to Siberia. People were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. They were caught unawares. The majority of them died on the way due to starvation, cold and illnesses.
4. Anti-Semitic campaign initiated by J. Stalin against intellectuals: teachers, doctors and scientists.
5. 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Khrushchov publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what was happening in the USSR during the Stalin's leadership.