

Alexandr Nepomniaschy

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My family background

My name is Alexandr Borisovich Nepomniaschy. I was born on 20 September 1910 in the Jewish town of Dmitrovka Elisavetgrad province (Kirovograd region after the revolution), Ukraine. At my birth I was given the name of Shaya.

I'm almost 92 years old now and I don't remember much.

My father told me about the origin of our family name Nepomniaschy. In the XVIII century there were cantonists in the army. My great grandfather was a cantonist, too. The first cantonists were in the Russian Empire during the reign of Alexander I. The first school of cantonists was established by General Arakcheev. At that time the service term was 25 years and the recruitment age – 18. Boys were taken to cantonists' schools at 12. They were living at the barracks at schools. They were taught main military disciplines and march songs. They also got some general education. When they became of recruitment age cantonists went to the army. Cantonists were also required to be tall and well-built handsome men. Poor Jewish families with many children used to send their sons to become cantonists. Not all young men could bear 25 years of military service. They sometimes ran away from the army. When they were captured and asked their name they usually replied "I don't remember, I've forgotten". In this case they were registered as Nepomniaschy (meaning "does not remember" in Russian. Cantonists were of different nationalities. Therefore, this last name is quite common with Jewish, Russian or Ukrainian people.

My father's name was Boruh Nepomniaschy. He was born in the town of Smela, Cherkassy province, in 1880. He was a blacksmith and so was my grandfather. My father told me that after the ritual of Barmitsva at 13 his father asked him what profession he wanted to learn. My father assisted his father at the forge and he chose the profession of blacksmith. My father's parents lived in Smela Cherkassy province. My grandfather's name was Moishe, but I don't remember my grandmother's name. My grandfather was born in the early 1850s. My grandmother was few years younger. I believe, she was born around 1855. I don't know about where they were born.



My grandmother was a housewife. They had 4 children in the family. The oldest was Leib, born in 1876. He was called Lyova in the family. The second son was Nuhim, Naum, born in 1878. My father Boruh was born in 1880 and the youngest in the family was daughter Haika, born in 1884.

My father's family was religious. They observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My father's parents went to the synagogue every week. The boys studied at the cheder and the girls got education at home. According to the Jewish tradition the boys were circumcised when they were 8 days old. When the sons reached 13 they had Barmitsva. I know about it from what my father told me and know no more details. They spoke Yiddish in the family. After Barmitsva the boys were to learn a profession. My father Boruh and his brother Nuhim chose their father's profession. Both of them became blacksmiths and their brother Leib became a carpenter.

My father worked with his father in the forge and Nuhim decided to go on his own. In 1906 he moved to Vinnitsa and married a local Jewish girl. She was the daughter of an aging blacksmith that couldn't work any longer. He didn't have any sons and he was glad to get a chance to give his forge to his son-in-law. Nuhim was a good blacksmith and his wife and 3 children were well provided for. Nuhim and his whole family were shot in August 1941 when Germans occupied Vinnitsa.

My father's other brother Leib moved to Elisavetgrad and got married. He had three sons, born one after another. Leib died from pneumonia in the Ural where he was in the evacuation with his wife in 1943. His sons live in Germany.

My father's younger sister Haika got married in the early 1900-s and moved to Smela to join her husband. Haika was a housewife. She had a daughter. Her daughter works at the Hesed in Smela. Haika died, but I don't remember the date of her death.

My grandmother died in the summer of 1917. My grandfather died in 1920. My grandmother died in summer 1917. Both of them were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Smela.

My mother's nee name is Ostrovskaya. I know very little about her parents. Her father Nuhim Ostrovsky was born in the 1860s. My grandmother was born also in the 1860s. I don't remember her name or the place of birth of any of them. Their family lived in the town of Dmitrovka Elisavetgrad province. My grandfather was a timber dealer and my grandmother was a housewife. They had four children and my mother Rahil, born in 1884, was the oldest. Golda was born in 1886. Later they began to call her Olia. After Golda came sister Haya, Klara, born in 1890. Isaak was the last child. He was born in 1892. They had a traditional Jewish religious family. They observed Sabbath and celebrated all Jewish holidays in the family. My mother's sisters got married, were housewives and had children. Klara died before she was 40. I guess her brother Isaak was a carpenter, but I don't know for sure. Isaak's children live in Moscow. My grandfather died in the 1910s and my grandmother died in 1919. Both of them were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Dmitrovka.

My father moved to Dmitrovka when he was 24. There was a job for a blacksmith there and my father decided to try things on his own. He met my future mother Rahil Ostrovskaya there and they got married in 1904. They had a real Jewish wedding with a huppah. My mother was the oldest

daughter and was the first of the girls to be getting married.

My parents were renting a house in Dmitrovka. It was a big house built from oak wood in the central street of the town. There were 3 rooms and a big kitchen in the house. There was a pantry near the kitchen. My parents had a room and my sisters and my brother and I had nursery rooms. There was an orchard and a flower garden near the house. My mother didn't work and had a housemaid to help her about the house. There were 4 children in our family. My oldest sister Tsylia was born in 1905. My second sister Elizabeth was born in 1908. I was born in 1910. My younger brother Yakov was born in 1913. His Jewish name was Jacob and we called him Yasha. My younger brother was very ill. He had flu when he was a child and it caused chronic meningitis. Yasha was a very bright boy. When we were doing our homework he was very quick to grasp things and then helped us. My mother was looking for the doctors that could cure Yasha. She took him to Kiev, Moscow and Petersburg and even Germany. But the treatment was no success: after a short remission the disease came back. Yasha was suffering from splitting headaches. He died in 1933 before he reached 20 years of age.

My father owned a forge in the town. He had two Jewish young men as his assistants. When I grew older my father used to take me to his forge to teach me his business. My father was a highly qualified blacksmith. Besides hammering he also shoed horses. My father earned a lot. He was highly valued as a specialist in the town and a respectable man.

Growing up

Approximately two thirds of the population was Jewish. Dmitrovka and a few neighboring towns were built as Jewish colonies in XVIII century. During the reign of Elizabeth II the population was Jewish. The Jewish families that were willing to move received allowances from the treasury to start their life in the colony anew. Each family received a house and a plot of land. Each town had one or two synagogues, cheder and a hospital. Gradually representatives of other nationalities were joining the Jewish population of the towns. However, the Jews were prevailing. There was a synagogue in Dmitrovka. Around the middle of the XIX century a Christian church was built in the central street of the town. There was a market near the central square where the local people were selling their products. My mother rarely went to the market – it was the responsibility of the housemaids. Besides, my father often received food products as payment for his work. My mother sometimes went to the market taking me with her to help her carry her bags. I remember the long rows of stands made from planks. The stands were always washed and the planks were almost white. Elisavetgrad was a southern town and there were lots of products at the market. I was always happy to go to the market, because I enjoyed the bright colors of vegetables and fruit. Each vendor had his or her own customers. I remember the poultry row where they were only selling live chicken. These hens had their legs tied and were all in big baskets. Sometimes they started flapping their wings. I knew that after someone bought them they took them to the shoihet to have the chicken slaughtered. I felt sorry for them and each time had a hope that at least one of the hens would manage to fly away. I even remember the local chicken breed – they were of bright colors, especially roosters. The hens were red and there were dark-blue, green and black feathers in their tails. I also remember vendors selling pieces of butter wrapped in big cabbage leaves. There were drops of water on green leaves and the little rainbows were playing in them. I have never forgotten those reminiscences from my childhood.

My parents were religious people. Each Saturday my father and mother went to the synagogue. My father was a tall, strong and broad-shouldered man. He looked very handsome to me when he put on his black jacket and his black wide-brimmed hat to go to the synagogue. My mother had two fancy gowns to wear them to the synagogue. She wore the black woolen gown in winter and the black silk one in summer. My mother covered her head with a black lace shawl before leaving home. When I grew older my parents began to take me to the synagogue with them. I had a black suit with long trousers tailored for me and I was very proud of it. We celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. Mama lit candles on Friday evening, then moved her hands above them and covered her face with her hands. On Friday morning the housemaids (non-Jewish) cooked Saturday dinner and meals for the following day. It wasn't allowed to start a fire on Saturday to heat the meal; so, they made a dish with meat, potatoes and beans in a big ceramic pot to leave it in the stove overnight. It stayed warm until the following day. White halas were mandatory for Sabbath dinner. The dough was getting ripe in a big oak tub from morning, and the baking was done in the evening. They were still hot when they were served. They were supposed to be broken rather than cut. At Pesach the house was to be thoroughly cleaned. They were sweeping and burning pieces of bread and bread crumbs. The Easter dishes were taken down from the attic – Pesach was the only time when we were using it. We brought big bags of matsa from the synagogue. We had no bread in the house during these days. My mother and housemaids were cooking all traditional Pesach dishes: chicken broth and stuffed fish. I always helped them to crush matsa in a big copper mortar. It was sifted and then they made sponge cakes and cookies from this flour. At Hanukkah we, kids, always got the Hanukkeh gelt. I also remember the Purim holiday. There were always performances of Purimshpil in the town. There was a stage installed in the middle of the town and actors came from Elisavetgrad – it was all so interesting. My mother always made delicious triangle little pies with poppy seeds at Purim – gomentashy. They had a funny name – Aman's ears. When I was small I couldn't understand why such an evil creature would have such delicious ears.

The revolution of 1917 was appreciated by the population of the town. They trusted the promises of the new power about a better life for the working people.

In 1918 there were Jewish pogroms¹ in the town. The gangs of Ataman Grigoriev attacked the town most often. My father had weapons and could fight well. When the gangs of Grigoriev were in town he defended our family and other Jewish families that were hiding in our house. When the bandits were trying to break into the house my father started shooting and the bandits went away, saying that those should not have been Jews if they were shooting. They killed many Jews in the synagogue. After this pogrom my father decided to leave this town. He realized that the bandits would be back to the house where they faced resistance. My father's brother Leib, Lyova, lived in Elisavetgrad. My father took his family there in 1918 leaving their belongings in the house. There were no pogroms in bigger towns. Bandits attacked smaller towns where they found no rebuff.

We rented an apartment in the center of Kirovograd. My father worked as a blacksmith. I went to the cheder when I was 8. Cheder was only for boys and my sisters didn't go there. Our teacher was teaching us to read and write in Yiddish and Hebrew. We studied arithmetic and knew our prayers by heart. When I reached 13 I had Barmitsva at the synagogue. I read my prayer by heart. I don't remember the whole ritual, but I remember feeling myself very mature after it was over. I believe it was for the ceremony that my father gave me his thales and tfillin, but at that time it was a mere formality for me and I never put them on afterward.

My parents went to the synagogue and celebrated Jewish holidays at home, although it was the period of anti-religious propaganda already

Beside cheder I and my sisters, went to a Ukrainian lower secondary school. I became a pioneer at school – we were called young Leninists. I was doing well at school. There were children of various nationalities at school, but I didn't know any difference between a Jew and non-Jew then. We were friends, played football, went tobogganing in winter and swimming in the river in summer. There was no national segregation. At home we lived our routinely life celebrating Jewish holidays, going to the synagogue and celebrating birthdays. However, I didn't observe Jewish traditions any more. They convinced me at school that there was no God and that religion was vestige of the past. After finishing school at 16 I entered the Jewish College in 1926. Besides academic subjects we also studied profession. Teaching was in Yiddish. I got the profession of a turner. I also became a Komsomol member at College. After finishing this College I got a job at the Kirovograd agricultural machine building plant. I was 19 years old then. My father went to Petersburg looking for a job. He wrote that it was an interesting and beautiful town.

By that time my sisters were at various locations as well. Tsylia married Aron Grossman and moved to Leningrad with him. Elizabeth entered Department of Economy at the Novgorod Institute of Commerce after finishing school. She met there a Russian young man Pavel Liapunov and they got married. My parents welcomed their marriage regardless of their religious convictions. It was a common idea after the revolution that there should be no nationalities in the new world free from rich people and that we were all Soviet people. My sisters didn't have any wedding parties. They had civil ceremonies to register their marriage. Elizabeth and her husband got a job assignment in Odessa. They lived there before the war working at the department of commerce. In 1938 their son Yury was born.

I decided to go to Leningrad. We didn't have any relatives in Leningrad. I went to the employment agency and told them that I was a turner. They asked me whether I was a Komsomol member and sent me to work as a turner at the military plant "Bolshevik". I had good performance records and was a Komsomol activist. I attended Komsomol meetings, followed all political events in the country, read proletariat newspapers, helped the newcomers to learn the profession, conducted political information classes, speaking for the Soviet power. I believed sincerely in the idea of building communism in the whole world. In 1930 I became a candidate to the party and in 1931 I became a member of the Communist party. Once I was called to come to the district Komsomol committee. They told me that they wanted to send me to study at the Institute. I agreed and was admitted to the Mechanic Engineering department at the Leningrad Mining Institute without having to pass any exams in 1931. I lived at the hostel of this Institute. About half of students and lecturers at the Institute were Jewish. There was no national segregation between us. There was no anti-Semitism at all at that time. I graduated from the Institute with honors in 1936 when I was 26.

1932–33 was the period of horrific famine in Ukraine². We didn't have it in Leningrad, but my parents were in Ukraine where the situation was very hard. I sent them parcels with food and my father went to work in Russia and brought some food home. In this way they survived.

When Hitler came to power in 1933 there was information in mass media that Germans were chasing Jews out of the country and killing them. I didn't quite believe it. I was convinced that Germans were reasonable and educated people. Many people thought so, too.

In 1936 I graduated from the Institute and came to see my parents and have some rest in Kirovograd. I met my future wife in Kirovograd. She lived in the same street as my parents. My best friend turned out to be her relative. We were having a walk with him once and met her. We began to see each other. My wife's name is Revekka Mendeleyevna Mexina, a Jewish girl. She was born in Novo-Ukrainka Kirovograd region, in 1913. Later her family moved to Kirovograd. They also lived in Donbass where she finished a college and got a profession of electrician. Her grandfather lived in Kirovograd and she was visiting him when we met. I left Kirovograd and we wrote one another for some time. In one of my letters I proposed to her and she sent me a cable with one word "Yes".

We got married in Dmitrov, Podmoscovie, where Revekka was living with her family, in 1938. We had a civil ceremony at the registry office and then had a small dinner party for the closest people at Revekka's home. My wife's parents were religious: they celebrated Sabbath and always lit candles, went to the synagogue and celebrated all Jewish holidays. I don't think they strictly followed the kashruth, but they kept dishes for milk and meat products separately. Of course, I became an atheist when I became a party member, but I've always had a respect towards religious people. I've never spoken against religion, because I believe that religion does no harm. Religion keeps many people from evil and they do their duty. Believers do not become evil people.

After graduation from the Institute I was sent to work in the town of Shahty, Rostov region. I worked as a mechanic at a mine and then had to serve in the army. I had a higher education and my service term was one year. I was a private and then I became a senior sergeant in Stavropol region, Caucasus. This was the time when repression began³. None of my family suffered. At first I believed that the people that were arrested were guilty, but when they were arrested and shot such great commanders as Yakir and Tukhachevsky I began to doubt that the authorities were fair. I couldn't believe that the professional military that gave so much effort to their service in the army were enemies of the people. It was then that I began to have big doubts that Stalin was doing everything right.

In 1938 I returned to Leningrad and got a job at the Voroshylov machine building plant. Later management of the plant received the task to select a candidate to study at the Armed Forces Academy and they selected me. I studied at the Academy for a year and became designer of large caliber cannons. I got a job assignment in Stalingrad and my wife and I moved there. In 1939 our son Valery was born in Stalingrad. Although my wife and I were raised in the religious families we didn't observe Jewish traditions. We didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays. We celebrated Soviet holidays and the New Year and also birthdays. My wife and I spoke Russian to our son and with each other. .

In 1940 I got a job assignment as a weapon designer in Kramatorsk, Donetsk region. They were developing new types of weapons. They were in need of specialists to design large caliber weapons. They did not only design weapons at this plant – they also manufactured it. They had shops with endless rows of cannons.

My wife worked as an electrician at the station. At first my mother-in-law was looking after my son. Later she had to return to Dmitrov and we hired a nanny. Revekka's father died in February 1941. We decided that it would be better for her mother if she moved in with us. In March 1941 my mother-in-law joined us.

Although in 1939 Hitler occupied Poland we didn't think that Germany would start a war with the USSR. Molotov and Ribbentrop executed the Non-Aggression Agreement⁴ that convinced us that here was going to be no war. We had a well-armed army and it even didn't occur to us that somebody would dare to attack us. We believed one thing, but another thing happened. Of, course, the leadership of our country was to blame that they believed in all these agreements. They should have taken care of our defense. They didn't and that was why so many people suffered. Hitler broke into our country easily when he could have been stopped.

During the war

22 June 1941⁵ was Sunday. We were living in the working neighborhood in the outskirts of the town. My wife and I went shopping to the town. When we returned home at 12 the speech of Molotov was already on the radio⁶. He announced the perfidious attack of Germany of the USSR. On that same day I was summoned to the recruitment office where they told me that I was to mobilize to the front. I was given the rank of senior political officer that was equivalent to the rank of captain.

My wife, my son and my mother-in-law were staying in Kramatorsk. I was sent to infantry division 823 of the South-Western Front near Kiev. I went to the Headquarters to tell them that my profession was mechanical engineer and that I wanted to serve in the artillery units. I was appointed as artillery unit 823 deputy commanding officer for technical services. This regiment was defending Kiev and the suburbs. In September 1941 the South-Western front was encircled by fascists and they occupied the whole Kiev region area. The Germans got many prisoners-of-war. Once we tried to break through the encirclement of the Germans, but I failed. I was wounded. It was my leg – fortunately, I had all necessary medications and bandages to treat the wound. We decided to hide in the haystack during the night and then look around in the morning to find a spot to cross the front line. Early in the morning I woke up from the smell of smoke. The Germans were burning haystacks where soldiers were hiding. I was captured as well as many of my comrades. All prisoners-of-war were taken to the collective farm yard in Bykovnia near Kiev. They gave the order for “Yuden’ – Jews to make a step forward. One Jew came out of the line and told the others to do the same. He said that the Germans were a civilized nation and did not intend to do any harm to the Jews. Other Jews began to step forward. I stayed where I was. Then one German began to walk between the lines looking at us. He came near me and asked whether I was a Jew. I said “No, no – Caucasus”. (Of course, all of my comrades knew that I was a Jew, but they didn't give me away. We didn't have any national conflicts and we were faithful to our front-line brotherhood ties that were stronger than any blood ties could ever be). This saved me. Almost all Jews stepped forward, because nobody knew that they were executing Jews. There were over 50 Jews: a general, few colonels, officers and privates. They were told to take off their clothes and then they were shot. Their bodies were thrown into a trench. The rest of us were escorted in the direction of Ovruch, Zhytomir region. My Ukrainian friends were holding me and I managed to walk as far as Ovruch. We didn't get any food or water on the way. A Slovakian regiment was located in Ovruch. After they occupied Czechoslovakia the Germans made Slovaks fight on their side. We were left under this Slovakian regiment supervision. The Slovaks gave us food and asked us what our profession was. I began to work as a locksmith and mechanic. Soon our group consisting of about 30 people was sent to Byelorussia via Kiev. I was the only Jew left in this group. In Kiev another Jew that ran away from the crowd that was taken to the Babiy Yar⁷ joined us and the guard didn't notice it. He

came to Byelorussia with us. There is a military town of Kodynki near Mozyr and we were taken there. I made a closer acquaintance with the Slovaks and found out that there were anti-fascists among them. We were accommodated in the barracks and were fed well. I worked as a locksmith fixing locks, etc. One Slovakian – Yan Bystran – became my friend. I decided to form a group to arrange an escape from the camp. The camp was guarded by Slovaks. Germans came every week to check whether all of us were there. We were lucky that the Slovaks were our guards. But I still decided that we had to escape.

I had to be very careful about forming a group of people. If fascists found out that somebody decided to escape they hanged the suspects. It took me almost a year to find the people I could trust and that wanted to escape from this camp.

There were about 15 of us in the group, including one Slovakian. In September 1942 I got the information that there was a big partisan unit near Mozyr that was moving at night. I decided it was time to escape to the partisans. Bystran helped us to pass the guard at the gate. We were moving at night and hiding in the woods during the day. Bystran supplied us with food, clothes and weapons – rifles and few grenades. Bystran also showed the Germans the opposite direction of our escape – this helped us, too.

It took us 3 days to reach the Headquarters of the partisan unit of General-major Kovpak. I reported to the guard that I had brought a group to join their partisan unit. The guard took away our weapons and took us to the commander of the unit. Kovpak told me that they had the direction of Stalin to reduce anyone returning from captivity to the rank of private, even the generals. I replied that I was ready to join his unit as a private. We were distributed between the subdivisions. I was enrolled into a cannon company to handle shells. I got acquainted with my comrades and fixed some anti-tank cannons. Our commissar was Semyon Vassilievich Rudnev, a very nice man. One day he told me that it was time for me to take an officer's position. I became the political officer in a company and then the commissar of a battalion. I took part in all battles. We were moving to Ukraine from Byelorussia and then we were directed to take a march in Western areas of Ukraine. There was a ghetto and a camp for political prisoners-of-war in the town of Skalat, Ternopol region. We liberated the town from Germans and opened the gates of the ghetto and the prison. The Germans had big food storage facilities in this town. We gave the food products to the local population. We had horses and were a well-armed unit.

At the beginning there were about 600 people in this unit, but later their number exceeded 1000 people. There were 150 Jews in our partisan unit. Some Jews were hiding in the woods from Germans waiting until we came. Many families came to join us, but we couldn't afford to keep families with us, because we were a military unit. We were arranging settlements for them in the woods to give shelter to women and children. We used every opportunity to supply them with food and medications. We also had our hospitals in such settlements. We also provided quite a few people with false documents.

In 1943 the Germans threw big forces to destroy us near Yaremcha, Ivano-Frankovsk region. We were in the woods and our commander was commissar Rudnev. He was killed in one of the battles. We separated in smaller units and moved to Zhytomir region. General Kovpak was wounded and taken to hospital by plane. This happened at the beginning of 1944. Then Pyotr Petrovich Vershygora, the former actor of the Kiev Russian Drama Theater, became our commander. At the

beginning of the war he was an intelligence officer and then became a commanding officer of the intelligence unit in the Kovpak partisan unit. In 1944 we were fighting with Germans in Poland under his commandment.

I didn't have any contact with my family throughout this period. The only thing I knew was that Germans occupied Kramatorsk in November 1941. I didn't know whether my family survived.

When we were in Poland we were visited by Korotchenko, secretary of the Communist party of Ukraine. He talked with me and asked me where my family was. I replied that I didn't know – they were probably somewhere in the evacuation. Korotchenko found my family through the evacuation agency in Buguruslan and sent me their address. I sent them a letter to let them know that I was alive. They wrote me that my sisters' husbands were at the front and that my parents and my sister Elizabeth and her son Yury were in Kramatorsk with my wife. My older sister Tsylia that lived in Leningrad was evacuated to Novosibirsk where the plant where she was working moved. All other members of my family evacuated to Novosibirsk from Kramatorsk. My father worked as a blacksmith, my sister Tsylia was an accountant at the plant and my other sister Elizabeth was working at the municipal department of commerce. My wife was working as electrician at the power plant. Her mother was looking after our son Valery. At the end of 1944 when our unit returned to Ukraine from Poland I got a vacation and went to Novosibirsk to visit my family. I was really happy that I could see them. After I returned to the army headquarters in Kiev I was told that the war was over for me. Officers from the partisan units were sent to restore the public economy that was actually destroyed. I went to Western Ukraine. Even before the war I heard that Chernovtsy was a nice town and there were many Jews living there. At the beginning of 1945 I got a job assignment in Chernovtsy and received an apartment there.

After the war

In July 1945 I went to Novosibirsk to pick up my family and bring them to Chernovtsy. I brought back my son, my wife and her mother, my parents and my sister Elizabeth and her son. Tsylia and her son returned to Leningrad along with the plant where she was working. Her husband returned from the front. After the war they had another son. Tsylia died in 1985. Her older son got married and he and his wife emigrated to Israel. They live in Jerusalem. He works as a designer for an architectural company. His daughter Masha was in the army and then entered the university. Tsylia's younger son lives in America. He and his wife are programmers.

I found an apartment for my parents not far from where we live. Elizabeth's husband perished at the front and she lived with my parents. I supported them. My mother died in 1972. My father died on 5 January 1975. Elizabeth was working at the regional department of commerce and her son, Yury was studying at school. After finishing school Yury entered and graduated from the archive institute. He was Chief of Regional Archive Department in Chernovtsy. Her son Yury Liapunov is a volunteer in Hesed now. Elizabeth died in 1997.

Chernovtsy regional party committee sent me to "Enamel dishes" factory as Chief engineer. Then I got a job as Chief engineer at another factory and worked there several years. My wife got a job of electrical engineer at the Chernovtsy garrison where she worked until she retired. My mother-in-law was living with us. In 1947 she went to her older daughter Ida in Moscow. She returned in 1957 when she was deadly ill. My wife and I took good care of her. She was a religious woman and we

began to celebrate Jewish holidays for her sake, and kept celebrating the Soviet holidays. At Pesach my wife was buying matsa and cooking traditional meals. My mother-in-law fasted at Yom-Kipur. She died in 1961. It was a big loss for us. After her death we didn't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrated holidays for a long time, because we were atheists.

1948 was the period of struggle against cosmopolitanism. It didn't touch anyone in our family. They persecuted culture and art workers and lecturers of higher educational institutions. They closed the Jewish theater and the Jewish school in Chernovtsy. The population didn't believe that those accusations were true. I also understood that the «case of the Kremlin doctors»⁸ in 1953 was just a game to justify the state anti-Semitism after the war. I can't say that my family suffered from the state anti-Semitism in one way or another. But we were in a privileged position in comparison with the others. I was a veteran of the partisan movement and was awarded many orders. They just couldn't reach me just because I had too many privileges. But many of my acquaintances did face anti-Semitism. But I can say for sure that there has never been any anti-Semitic attitude in everyday life in Chernovtsy. People have always been friendly towards Jews here.

My wife and I were very happy to hear about Israel. We've never forgotten our Jewish roots. I am proud that Jews managed to turn a desert into oasis and that they can defend their country. I am very concerned about the current situation in Israel.

I didn't care much about Stalin's death in 1953. Many people didn't know how to go on. I was far from thinking anything like this. I had a son and my family – with or without Stalin. I realized that things were far from fair in the country and I knew the final truth after the XX Party Congress⁹.

My son went to a Russian school in 1947. He studied well and was especially fond of mathematics. In 1957 he finished 10 years of school with a silver medal. He wanted to study at the university in Moscow, but he failed to enter it. In 1958 Valery entered the department of cybernetics at Chernovtsy university. In 1963 he graduated from the university with honors. Later he finished post-graduate studies at the Novosibirsk Institute of Cybernetics and became a candidate of mathematical sciences. Now he is director of the laboratory at the Institute of Cybernetics in Novosibirsk. He has over 150 publications.

*Valery got married in Chernovtsy in June 1966 when he was visiting us during his vacation. His wife Anna Yahotinskaya, a Jew, also graduated from Chernovtsy University. They knew each other since they were students. Valery and Anna had a civil registration ceremony and had a small party inviting their closest friends and relatives. Then they went to Novosibirsk where they live now. Anna had a difficult childhood. She was born in the Khotyn ghetto in 1942. Anna's sister Klara was also born in the ghetto in 1944. When in 1944 the Soviet army liberated inmates of the ghetto Anna's father was recruited to the army. He perished at the front. Her mother was raising her two daughters alone. Anna is a candidate of science now. She goes to international conferences, has many publications and reads a special course at the Novosibirsk university. Unfortunately, Anna's difficult childhood had its impact on her life – she has no children. **[Alexander asked us take tale about his son from his wife Revekka Mexina's interview. Alexander is agree with her words.]***

I went to work as Chief engineer at Chernovitsles (timber company). It took me too long to get there. I was offered a job of the teacher of car repairs course at the Construction College and I

accepted it. There were many Jews among the teachers there. In 1986 I retired. I created the organization of veterans of the war in my neighborhood. I arrange meetings with schoolchildren and students to tell them how we came to the victory and what price we paid for it. Young people listen to me with interest and attention.

After the war I met with Yan Bystran that helped me to escape from captivity. I invited him to Chernovtsy and he came with his family. He spoke at the meeting in our college. He invited me to come to Slovakia and my wife and I visited him there. Regretfully, Yan died.

When the Jews began to emigrate to Israel I sympathized with them and was a little bit jealous. My wife and I can't move there, because our son lives here. Valery likes his work and doesn't want to go anywhere. My wife and I shall be where he is. At least, he can visit us once a year. If we were in Israel we wouldn't be able to see him. It is not good that he is so far away from us. Our son and our daughter-in-law invite us to move to them, but we are too old to take such long trips.

I was in Israel in 1996. I had a phone call from Koen, Chairman of the Union of Invalids of War in Israel. He told me that my comrades asked him to invite me to Israel for the 9th of May, Victory Day. I said that it was my dream to see this country and I would love to come. I was 86 at that time. There were 3 other people from Russia and Ukraine invited to visit Israel. We had a very warm reception. We had a car and could go on tours and everywhere. I admired the standards of living in this country. Veterans of war have everything they need. They attended parties at restaurants, they danced and sang and enjoyed life. I didn't see one single veteran begging in the streets as it happens in our country.

I take an active part in the Jewish life. I founded "Veteran Club" in Hesed. I am a honored Chairman there and make reports on participation of Jews in the war. Many people are of the opinion that Jews weren't at the front. It is not true. Many Jews were struggling heroically and many perished at the front and in partisan units. People do not forget about the war and I do not forget it either. We were at the war, many people perished and I believe that my biggest award is that I'm still alive.

My wife and I used to attend Jewish concerts and performances recently. We understand Yiddish well. But my wife hasn't been out of the apartment for some time. She is ill and we have a coming in nurse from Hesed. We are well provided for. We are a small garrison now consisting of the two of us. I'm logistics manager at home. I do the shopping and my wife cooks and washes dishes. I help her, too. In 1998 we had a diamond wedding anniversary and a festive celebration at the Municipal Registry Palace.

I have been a member of the Council of the Jewish Culture society for many years. My wife and I read Jewish newspapers and magazines. I receive the "Word of the Invalid of War" magazine from Israel. It's a very good magazine. I'm in good terms with our rabbi, he is a very nice man. I can't say that I'm religious, but I'm not anti-religious, either. I don't go to the synagogue, because I can't just be sitting and listening, I must be doing something. But I know prayers and all rituals. My wife and I celebrate Sabbath and Pesach at home. Although I was a pioneer, a Komsomol member and a communist, I have always been and remained a Jew.

Glossary

1 In 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

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

3 In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.

4 Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which fall into history under name Molotov-Ribbentrop pactum. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government in 1939 began secret negotiations for a nonaggression pact with Germany. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German pact of friendship and nonaggression. This pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

5 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.

6 MOLOTOV (Skriabin) Viacheslav Mikhailovich (1890-1986) , a Soviet political leader During the October revolution he was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee. He was belonged to the closest political surrounding of I.V. Stalin; one of the most active organizers of repression in the 1930s - early 1950s. He spoke against criticism of the cult of Stalin in mid 1950s.

7 Babiy Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the fascists on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev.

8 «Doctors' Case» - The so-called Doctors' Case was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with murder of outstanding Bolsheviks. The "Case" was started in 1952, but was never finished because Stalin died in 1953.

9 The 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 period of Stalin's leadership.