

Fira Shwartz

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Kiev

Ukraine

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Fira lives in a big comfortable apartment in Troyeschina - a new neighborhood in Kiev. One can tell that the family cares for one another and keeps the home in good order. Fira is a very sociable lady, although interviewing her is a bit tough: she only talks about what she wants to talk about and avoids any subjects that may bring back heart-rending memories.

I have no information about the family of my father Israel Shwartz. He perished when I was a small child. I've never met anybody from his family. I don't even know where my father was born. We only have a death certificate stating that he died at the front near Leningrad in 1942 at the age of 41. Therefore, he must have been born in 1901.

I know more about my mother's family. My grandfather on my mother's side, Itzyk Borodianskiy, was born in Gornostaypol, a small town near Chernobyl, in the 1860s. He came from a poor family with many children. His parents were religious and observed all Jewish traditions. My grandfather studied at cheder and at 10 he became an apprentice to a glasscutter. He worked as a glasscutter in Gornostaypol for his whole life. He owned a small shop where he received and carried out orders.

My grandfather was married twice. He had two sons from his first marriage: Samuel, born in 1892 and Yankel, born in 1897. My grandfather's first wife died shortly after Yankel was born. About a year after his wife's death my grandfather remarried. His second wife, Esther, was ten years younger than my grandfather. Her family lived in Chernobyl. She came from a poor family, was the younger daughter and had no dowry. Esther was a housewife and a very nice woman. My mother, Rosa Borodianskaya, was born in 1905. My grandmother died in 1932 during the famine in Ukraine [1](#). She died before I was born, and all I know about her is what my mother told me. We also kept a photograph of her.

They lived in a small wooden house in Gornostaypol with three small rooms and a kitchen. My mother took me there once when I was 5 years old. I have some dim memories of my grandparents' house. There were earthen floors with quilted rugs on them. It was dark in the rooms because the windows were very small, and there were trees around the house. There were two stoves in the house: one in the kitchen, which was used for cooking and heating one room, and one to heat the two other rooms. The stoves were stoked with wood because charcoal was too expensive at the time. The ceilings were low and whitewashed. I remember a big nickel-plate bed, in which my mother and I were sleeping during our visit. The letter 'E' was embroidered on the sheets, and my mother told me that my grandmother Esther did the embroidery. There were also woolen carpets on the walls embroidered by my grandmother. They had a garden and a kitchen garden near the house.

My mother's older brothers studied at cheder. They also completed seven years of the Jewish lower secondary school in Gornostaypol. My mother studied at secondary school for eight years.

My mother's parents were religious. Her father read religious books after work. He prayed in the mornings and in the evenings. I don't know for sure whether there was a synagogue in Gornostaypol, but I believe there must have been one. Uncle Samuel told me that there were quite a few Jewish families living in Gornostaypol. My mother's family celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. I know this from my mother's brother Samuel, who later replaced my parents.

Gornostaypol was a small and quiet town. All stormy events shattering the country at that time - Jewish pogroms, the Revolution of 1917 [2](#) and the Civil War [3](#) - didn't affect the town. I know that the Revolution didn't change anything in the life of my mother's family: They had been poor before and they remained poor afterwards.

My grandparents' children left the house when they grew up. Samuel became a tailor in Gornostaypol and moved to Kiev when he was 17. He got a job at a military tailor's shop where they made uniforms for soldiers and officers. He was an apprentice there at first, but he was very good at sewing and soon became one of the best tailors of the shop. He married a Jewish girl called Rosa. She came from Kiev. They had two children: a son called Semyon, born in 1922 and a daughter, Bella, born in 1928.

Yankel moved to Baku, Azerbaijan [2,000 km from Gornostaypol]. He went with his former classmate whose brother had moved to Baku two years before. I know very little about Yankel's life in Baku. He worked at a plant. He married a Jewish girl from Baku named Diphia, and they had two children: a daughter called Beba and a son called Naum.

After finishing school in the 1920s my mother moved to Kiev. Uncle Samuel convinced her that there were more opportunities in a big town. I know very little about my mother's life before I was born. She told me that she worked as a nurse in a kindergarten. I don't know how she met my father. He was a forwarding agent at the railway post office. My parents got married soon after they met. My mother was 24; my father was four years older. They had a civil ceremony at the registry office. Weddings were considered to be a bourgeois vestige, so they had no wedding party.

My father lived in a communal apartment [4](#). There were two other families living in this apartment. My father's room was small and dark. Its only window faced an entry corridor of the building. There was a wardrobe, my parent's bed, my bed, a table and a few chairs in the room. There was a big common kitchen where each family had its own Primus stove. There was a strong smell of kerosene in the kitchen due to kerosene containers that were kept there. My mother worked for some time after she got married, but she quit her job before I was born and stayed at home afterwards.

I was born in Kiev in April 1936. My mother called me Fira. Actually, this is affectionate for Esphir, but Fira was the name my mother gave me and the name written on my birth certificate.

I remember very little of my childhood before the war. I didn't go to kindergarten. My father often went on business trips, and I recall how happy I was when he returned from his trips. He took me out and bought me ice cream. I don't think my parents were religious. At least, I don't remember any celebrations of Jewish holidays or Sabbath at home. At that time religion was viewed as a thing of the past. Many young people rejected religious traditions and rituals as something outdated and

unnecessary. We spoke Russian and celebrated Soviet holidays when my father was home. My mother cooked and we had my father's colleagues over as guests.

Grandfather Itzyk visited us quite often. He was living alone in Gornostaypol at the time. I remember him praying every morning and every evening. He put on his tefillin before saying his prayers. He explained to me what it was. My grandfather also had a tallit, that was like a big white scarf with black stripes and frange on edges. My mother cooked Jewish food when my grandfather visited us: she made gefilte fish, chicken broth with dumplings and baked strudels. My mother told me that she learned how to cook Jewish food from her mother. My grandfather wore a black velvet kippah at home and a black cap to go out. He wore a long black jacket and striped black trousers. He had a small gray beard. My grandfather was short and very vivid. My mother and father spoke Yiddish with him, but he spoke Russian with me. He liked me a lot and called me ketsele [kitty]. My grandfather was an old man, and our neighbors treated him with respect.

I was 5 years old when the war began. I remember that my father and I were planning to go for a walk on the slopes of the Dnepr River that Sunday, but in the morning he told me that it was cancelled. I burst into tears, because I was so unhappy about it. My mother cried, too, and I thought that she was disappointed by not going to the park. Only later did I understand that she was crying because of the war.

My father was released from service in the army because he was a railroad employee. He also received a railroad carriage at his disposal for the evacuation of his family. We all went to evacuation in this carriage at the beginning of July 1941: my mother's brother Samuel, his wife and daughter Bella, my father's fellow worker, his wife and two children, and our family. Uncle Samuel was not subject to recruitment due to his age. Samuel's son, Semyon, was recruited to the army during the first days of the war even though he should have been released from the army because he had one shorter leg and walked with a limp. He perished at the front in the battle for Moscow in 1941. My mother's other brother, Yankel, lived in Baku throughout the war. He was ill and released from service in the army.

We had very little luggage with us. We only took the most necessary clothing, my toys and children's books, my bed linen and a few casseroles. My father told us that we would return home soon. I don't know how it happened that Grandfather Itzyk stayed behind in Gornostaypol. When the town was occupied by the Germans in September 1941 my grandfather went to Kiev on foot. He walked about 100 kilometers. Kiev was already occupied by the Germans. My grandfather didn't find us and was ordered to go to Babi Yar [5](#) along with many other Jews on 29th September 1941. We heard about this after we returned to Kiev in the fall of 1944.

We didn't know where we were going. I remember the first bombing near Kharkov. The train stopped and we jumped off the train to hide. I saw a German plane flying very low and I thought that the German pilot also saw me. After the bombing we returned to the train. We saw another train at the station. It had been destroyed by the bombing and many dead bodies were lying around it.

Uncle Samuel and his family got off the train at Buzuluk station - his acquaintances were living there. We moved on. The train stopped at Magnitogorsk, Cheliabinsk region [2,500 km from Kiev]. We got off there. All evacuated people settled down in the barracks there. There were two families in each room. The so-called 'rooms' were separated by sheets that served as 'partials'. We lived

with my father's co-worker, his wife and children. My father worked at the railway station in Magnitogorsk. At the beginning of 1942 he was recruited to the front. He wrote us a single letter from there. A few months later we received the notification of his death. It said that he perished close to the village of Malyie Krestry, near Leningrad. Regretfully, I have never been to the place where he was buried.

My mother and I were starving and freezing because we didn't have any winter clothes with us. I stayed inside the room for the whole winter. My mother had to go out to get some food in exchange for ration cards. She had to stand in long lines for hours and hours. I remember her buying a small fur tree on 31st December 1942. Then she went to the store. She came back with a face white as chalk and put a bag of food on the table. She went to bed saying that she was going to stay there and get warm. She never left the bed again. A week later she died of pneumonia.

I was staying with our co-tenants. They took me to the morgue to say farewell to my mother. My mother was lying on a steel table and there was a layer of ice on her face. I could never forget this image. Even after finishing school, when I would have been admitted to Medical College without exams, I recalled my mother's face under ice and realized that I couldn't study there. I wasn't allowed to attend my mother's funeral. She was buried in a common grave. There was not even a sign with the names of those that were buried there.

My mother had asked our co-tenant to write to her brothers. At the beginning of January 1943 Uncle Samuel came to pick me up and take me to Buzuluk. His family became mine. I started school in Buzuluk in 1943. I have no memories about that school. I only remember that I wanted to sing in the choir, but I wasn't admitted because I was too short.

In September 1944 we returned to Kiev. My uncle's apartment was occupied by a 'politzei' [expression used for former fascist menials]. We stayed with one of his acquaintances. My uncle returned to his former job at the tailor shop. He soon managed to get back his apartment, and we moved in there. It was a two-bedroom apartment in a two-storied wooden building in the center of Kiev. It used to be a communal apartment, but later it was refurbished into a two-bedroom apartment. There was gas heating and running cold water. We had a kitchen that had served as a corridor before; it was long and narrow. I lived in this apartment until the house was pulled down a few years ago.

In Kiev I studied in the 2nd grade of a Russian secondary school. I became a Young Octobrist [6](#) and later a pioneer. I loved dancing and begged my uncle to send me to a ballet school, but one had to pay for it, and he didn't have money to pay for my studies. My uncle didn't adopt me. He was my guardian so I received monthly allowances for my father, who had perished at the front. . My uncle treated me very kindly and supported me with everything I needed.

I was a sociable girl and made friends with almost all my classmates. The teachers and pupils were sympathetic to me. There were quite a few schoolchildren that had lost one parent to the war, but there weren't many that had lost both parents. I had free meals at the school canteen and received clothing and stationery every now and then. Half the pupils in my class were Jewish. There were also Jews among our teachers. I never really faced anti-Semitism in my whole life. Only once did some boys shout 'zhydovka' [kike] at me on my way home from school. I was taken aback but pretended that I hadn't heard them.

My uncle and his wife Rosa celebrated Sabbath and other Jewish traditions. I don't think they managed to follow the kashrut at that time. There was no place to buy kosher products. They never kept meat and dairy products in the same spot though, and there was no pork in our house. I became familiar with Jewish traditions through them. My uncle's wife always wore a shawl or a kerchief, even at home. At Chanukkah children were always given some money, although the family was poor. Every Friday Rosa cooked enough food to last for two days. She always managed to get some fish at the market. She made gefilte fish and baked challah in the oven. We prayed on Friday evenings, then Rosa lit the candles, and we sat down at the table for a festive dinner. My uncle had a tallit and he always wore his little cap and Rosa always wore a shawl.

Saturday wasn't a day off at that time. My uncle went to work in the morning whereas Rosa stayed at home and tried not to do any work. She used to say that her husband had to go to work, but that she had an opportunity to follow God's covenants.

At Pesach my uncle bought matzah at the only operating synagogue in Podol [7](#). Matzah was expensive; besides, it was rather difficult to get it at Pesach, because there were so many people that wanted matzah for this holiday. There was no bread at home at Pesach. Besides matzah we ate corn porridge on this holiday. Rosa cooked gefilte fish, boiled chicken and chicken broth with corn dumplings. She also made sponge cakes. My uncle conducted the seder, said the prayers and read the Haggadah.

At Purim Rosa always made hamantashen. Uncle Samuel and Aunt Rosa went to the synagogue at Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They also prayed at home and they fasted at Yom Kippur. My cousin and I didn't fast. We thought religious holidays to be a thing of the past, but we loved and enjoyed delicious food on holidays and always looked forward to such holidays. My aunt and uncle observed traditions but kept it a secret from their neighbors and acquaintances and told us to remain silent about it. They explained to us that my uncle might have problems at work if they found out about his religious conduct.

At school we celebrated Soviet holidays and the New Year. 10 On 1st May and 7th November [October Revolution Day] [8](#) everyone at school went to the parades and afterwards we gave concerts at school. My uncle and his family didn't celebrate Soviet holidays, but they enjoyed being off work. My cousin and I celebrated Soviet holidays with our friends.

After finishing lower secondary school I had to learn some profession and earn money for my living. I entered the Library Faculty at the College of Culture and Education. There were only girls in my group. Many of them came from villages. Only two of us were Jewish: I and another girl called Tverskaya. She was nice and we became friends. I knew from my uncle that she was Jewish. There was no anti-Semitism as far as I noticed. I got along well with my co-students and had many friends. I studied in college for three years and finished it in 1954.

I became a Komsomol [9](#) member in college. I was eager to become a Komsomol member. I liked to go to the movies and all the pretty and successful girls in these movies were Komsomol members. I believed that being a Komsomol member would change my life for the better.

I was 17 when Stalin died. I was never interested in politics and felt quite indifferent about his death. Besides, I had an appendicitis surgery at the time that took all my attention.

After finishing college I got a job assignment in the village of Vysokoye, Zhitomir region [200 km from Kiev]. Graduates usually got assignments in distant locations. I became a librarian there, but I had a very small salary - 400 rubles. My mandatory job assignment was to last three years. [This was a standard requirement that was to be followed by all graduates from higher educational institutions]. I rented a room from an old woman and had hardly enough money to make a living. Every now and then my uncle and his wife sent me food parcels. I had to stay in this village for another half year until they found a replacement for me.

I returned to Kiev in 1957, but I couldn't find a job as a librarian there. I couldn't live at my uncle's expenses and thus went to work in a shoe factory. At first I was a laborer at the storage facility, and later I became a laborer at the shop of the factory. I liked my job. The majority of the employees at the factory were Jewish. The director and chief engineer of the factory were also Jews. Of course, there was no anti-Semitism at the factory.

I met my future husband, a Jew by the name of David Kargorodskiy when I returned to Kiev. David was born in Kiev in 1936. Aunt Rosa and David's mother were close friends. David finished the Communication Faculty of the Mining College and got a job assignment in the Ural where he stayed for three years. His mother wanted David to meet a Jewish girl. She met me during one of her visits to Rosa. She liked me and when her son came to Kiev on vacation she introduced us to one another. We began to see each other.

David's mother, Haya Kargorodskaya, was a pensioner when we met. She had worked as a secretary at a plant before. Her husband, Leib Kargorodskiy, worked at the same plant. David's father was a very religious man. He always read the Talmud and the Torah at home, even after the war. He went to the synagogue on holidays. David's mother wasn't quite so religious. They always celebrated Sabbath: David's mother cooked a festive dinner, and they lit candles at home. David's parents celebrated all traditional Jewish holidays: Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They often talked in Yiddish, but David was far from being religious.

We got married in 1959. We had a civil wedding and a wedding party afterwards. There were many guests at the wedding. My Uncle Samuel, who was my guardian, received my monthly allowances for my father. He had been putting the money into my bank account, and my wedding was arranged from that money.

After our wedding David had to go back to the Ural where he was working. I quit my job and followed him. David was a communications supervisor. We got a room at the family hostel. I stayed there for a year after which I had to return to Kiev. I had to make sure that I kept my residence permit [10](#) in Kiev. A few times a year militia authorities sent their representatives to check whether tenants were residing in the apartments they were assigned to. My uncle sent me a telegram notifying me that I had to come back to Kiev in order to keep my permit to live in the apartment. Every member of the family living in one apartment had a stamp in his passport - parents had stamps in their passports for their children - and those stamps served as a residential permit. The authorities strictly checked that people were registered and resided where they were assigned to. So I went back to Kiev and my husband joined me after about a year's time, in 1960.

David's parents lived in one room in a communal apartment with many tenants. My husband and I moved in with my uncle. My cousin Bella was married by that time and lived with her husband. My husband and I were living in the room where my cousin and I had lived before. We got along well

with my uncle and aunt. We were a family. Although we were atheists we celebrated both Soviet and Jewish holidays with them because we respected my uncle's religiosity.

My husband got a job at the Giprosviaz Communications Design Institute. More than half of the staff of the institute was Jewish. David had no problems getting this job. I worked at the library. My husband and I didn't feel Jewish. We spoke Russian. I didn't know Yiddish at all, and David could only remember a few words from his childhood. We were an ordinary Soviet family and we felt like Soviet people. We raised our children that way, too. Our daughter, Margarita, was born in 1961 and our son, Igor, followed in 1968. My mother-in-law was helping me to look after Margarita, but as soon as a kindergarten opened near our home I took her there. Igor also went to nursery school and to kindergarten, and I went to work soon after he was born.

My uncle Samuel died in 1962. He was the only member of our family that was buried according to Jewish tradition. Such was his will and we fulfilled it. We buried my uncle at the Jewish cemetery in Berkovtsy [a neighborhood in the outskirts of Kiev]. The former rabbi of the Podol synagogue conducted the funeral. He was also buried in this cemetery when he died. Rosa, who died 6 years after her husband, and David's parents were buried without any rituals.

My mother's brother Yankel visited us in Kiev several times after the war. We corresponded but later he stopped writing. I have no information about him or his wife and only a bit about their children. Yankel's son Naum lived in Kiev after the war. He died before he turned 50. Yankel's daughter Beba got married. She had two children: a daughter called Galina and a son called Edik. After Beba's husband died in 1991 she moved to Germany with her daughter's family. They live there now.

In the early 1970s many Jews were moving to Israel. I wanted to move, too, but my husband was strictly against it. He said he grew up here and wouldn't be able to adjust to life in a capitalist country. I believed that our children would gain a lot by living in Israel and mostly wanted to go for their sake. I tried to convince him but he stood his ground. So we stayed in the USSR.

Neither my husband nor I were members of the Communist Party. In 1973 my husband insisted that I got a job at the Giprosviaz Institute where he was working. I got a job as an assistant secretary there. I made copies, did the typing, purchased new books for the institute and performed other small errands.

Our daughter Margarita finished lower secondary school and entered a medical college. After finishing this college she got a job as a masseur at a clinic. She Margaret got married in 1987. Her husband was a Russian. David and I weren't against their marriage. We had nothing against her Russian husband. We wanted my daughter to be happy. My granddaughter Karina was born in 1991. Unfortunately, Margarita got divorced. Her ex-husband supports her and Karina a lot though. We live with my daughter and granddaughter now. I retired after my granddaughter was born. My husband also retired after working in the institute for 43 years.

My son Igor studied at trade school after finishing secondary school. He became a mechanic and got a job at a vehicle maintenance yard. He was recruited to the army from there in 1987 and returned in 1989 after his service was over. It was difficult for him to find a job when he returned. This was already during the perestroika and unemployment was high. My son married a Ukrainian girl when he returned from the army. Their daughter Natalia was born in 1991. My son had to

support his family. He got a job as a laborer. I feel very sorry for him, but this was the only job that he could get. In 1995 Igor's son Sergey was born. My son lives with his wife's family. They have a nice three-bedroom apartment in a new neighborhood in Kiev.

In recent years, after Ukraine gained independence, the life of Jews has changed a lot. There are many Jewish organizations. We get much assistance from Hesed. My husband and I receive food packages. We appreciate this support a lot, especially when considering that we receive such small pensions. We also receive medication from Hesed and other medical services. We often attend lectures or other cultural activities. This is a great opportunity for us to communicate and socialize with others.

I have come closer to the Jewish identity of my family. I study the history of the Jewish people and take much interest in it. My Ukrainian friend took me to her church a few years ago. I've attended the Jewish messianic congregation for several years [the Jews for Jesus congregation]. Jews in our church are converted into Christians. Hesed doesn't acknowledge this community. We are viewed as renegades there.

It has become my road to God though. We don't study the Talmud there, we study the Bible instead. We have a very good pastor. There are over 1,000 people in this community. We often have visiting priests from abroad. I enjoy attending this community. We have services twice a week and I try to attend them all. There's a choir and a dance group. This group is called Glorification. We sing religious Christian and Jewish folk songs. Regretfully, my husband doesn't believe in God. I feel so sorry about it. But I accept and respect his views. Different opinions must not separate people in the family or in this world. I wish politicians would understand that. I start each day with the quotation of a song that we sing in the community: 'God has given us this day to rejoice!'

Glossary

1 Famine in Ukraine

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

2 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

3 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke

out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti- communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti- Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

4 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

5 Babi Yar

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

6 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

7 Podol

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

8 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

9 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread

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

10 Residence permit

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