

Boris Dorfman

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Lvov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Orlikova

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Boris Dorfman was one of the activists of the Jewish movement in Ukraine in the 1990s. He is about to turn 80, but he is still very active and it's hard to catch him in. Boris is a tall, slim and elegant man, although he belongs to the people that don't pay much attention to what they wear. We met on the 3rd floor of the Sholem Aleichem [1](#) Jewish Cultural Center. This building also houses a Jewish Sunday school. However hard Boris tries to do things for this school the building makes a depressing impression of overwhelming poverty: plywood partials with faded wallpaper, old broken desks and only one functioning socket in the classroom where we sit during the interview.

However, Boris is optimistic, courageous and full of energy. He is also involved in other things and attends conferences.



[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[Post-war](#)

[Married life](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family background

My ancestors lived in Bessarabia [2](#). My father's family came from Gancheshty town, near Kishinev [36 km from Kishinev, 514 km from Kiev]. It was a small, green Moldovan town in which Jews made up quite a big part of the population. Life was like in any other provincial town. There were an old synagogue, a Jewish community headed by the wealthiest Jewish man and numerous Jewish stores selling inexpensive wine since there were many vineyards around.

My paternal grandfather, Boruch Dorfman, was born in the 1850s. He owned a big store where he sold goods and a storage facility in the center of town. He had a seat in the synagogue.

Unfortunately, I don't know my grandmother's name or her date of birth. My grandmother and grandfather owned a big brick house with a steel roof in the center of the town. They had wooden floors, antique furniture and pictures in the house. There were a few rooms with beds in them. Six or seven of my grandparents' children lived there for some time. They only spoke Yiddish in the family.

They observed all Jewish traditions following all rules and requirements of the Jewish way of life. They baked challah for Sabbath and lit candles on Friday evenings. They observed all Jewish holidays. They usually invited poor Jews to their Sabbath and holiday dinners as was the custom at that time. Boys went to cheder at the age of 5 or 6. Girls had teachers that taught them at home. My grandparents died before I was born. My grandmother died in 1913 and my grandfather passed away in 1922. They were buried in white sheets and in accordance with all Jewish customs. There was a rabbi reciting a prayer and a cantor. Members of the family recited the Kaddish for a whole year after their death.

My grandparents' older daughter inherited the house. I've forgotten her name. I visited my aunt once or twice in my early childhood. I have very dim memories about her. I only remember that she had two daughters who were older than I and I had little interest in them. Some of the other sisters and brothers left for America in the 1920s, I don't even know their names and have no other information about them either.

My father, Mendel Dorfman, was born in 1888 and was my grandparents' youngest child. I think my father was an intelligent child. The only education he got was at cheder and he must have had good teachers there because he was quite well-educated. My grandfather couldn't afford to pay for any further education. My father's mother tongue was Yiddish. He also had fluent Hebrew, Russian, Romanian and German. My father was good at mathematics and accountancy. He was a tall, handsome young man. When World War I began in 1914 he was recruited to the tsarist army. He was a brave soldier fighting for the Russian tsar. I know that he was awarded a medal; I think it was a Georgian Cross [St. George Cross] [3](#). In 1916 he was held in German captivity. I remember him telling me of this hard time and how the captives suffered from hunger. In his parents' home he observed the kashrut, but when a captive he had to abandon it in order to survive.

My father was released in 1919. The Russian Empire had disappeared after the Revolution of 1917 [4](#). My father returned to his hometown. He helped his father with his commercial business. He often traveled to Kishinev on business. Once he visited my mother's father on some business and saw my mother. He fell in love with her.

My maternal grandfather, Aaron Zinger, was related to Spanish Jews; his ancestors originated from Spain in the Middle Ages. He was born in Kiliya in 1860. This small town [230 km from Kishinev, 724 km from Kiev] was situated in the estuary of the Danube River, on the border with Romania. My grandfather studied at the Medical Faculty of Vienna University for a few years until his father asked him to follow into his footsteps and continue the family business. He took over his father's trading business. Grandfather Aaron was a very wealthy man. The Zinger family owned quite a few houses in Kishinev and other towns in Bessarabia; they also owned stores and storage facilities. They sold alcohol, tobacco and shoes. They owned land, horses and carriages.

The Zinger family was religious. They observed traditions and all Jewish holidays. However, if business required my grandfather's presence, he would miss a prayer service at the synagogue on Saturdays. In Kishinev [today the capital of the Moldavian Republic, 478 km from Kiev] the Jewish population constituted over 50,000 people. There were several Jewish communities and about 50 synagogues and prayer houses. My grandfather funded one synagogue. This was the synagogue of the Zinger family, or, that's how the family called it because my grandfather was one of its most generous donors. The Zingers spoke Russian in the family, although they knew Romanian, Russian

and German. My grandfather was a decent and respected man. In the 1930s he left his business to his children due to his old age.

My grandfather's life ended tragically. When Soviet troops occupied Bessarabia in 1939 my grandfather and most of his children were declared kulaks [5](#). The Soviet regime dispossessed them of what they had earned by working hard. Simply speaking, they robbed them in favor of the state. When fascists came in 1941 my grandfather failed to evacuate and perished. I was told later that all Jews were taken away and exterminated. Nobody knows where my grandfather's grave is.

His wife, my grandmother Brucha Zinger [nee Rozenfeld], was born to the family of Rabbi Rozenfeld in Kishinev in the 1860s. After her marriage she became the observer of religious traditions in her family. My grandmother had many brothers and sisters who were very close to her. They often visited her. My grandparents had twelve children. All of them lived in their own houses. They observed Purim and Pesach and other holidays along with their parents. I remember a Simchat Torah celebration in my grandparents' garden where up to 200 guests got together for a festive meal. There was gefilte fish, chicken broth, goose liver paste and other delicious food especially made for the holiday. My grandmother had housemaids, cooks, a laundress, a gardener and a coachman. My grandmother's daughter Liya supervised their preparations for holidays.

During summer vacations my grandmother went to a resort. She and her relatives often went to the Romanian coast of the Black Sea or to Transcarpathia. I remember my grandmother when she was old. She was a short, big woman and wore a black dress. She didn't wear a wig or a kerchief. My grandmother died in 1937. She had a traditional Jewish funeral. There were many people at the funeral - almost the whole town came to pay last respect to her. She was carried all the way to the Jewish cemetery located on the outskirts of town. A mourning prayer was recited over her grave. This cemetery was destroyed after the war when Soviet authorities were trying to destroy the memory of the Jews who lived in this town. Now there is a park on the spot, which has almost become a center of Kishinev.

My grandparents had five sons - Iosif, Isaac, Srul, Shlomo and Shmil the youngest - and seven daughters: Liya, the oldest, Chiza, my mother Molka, Feiga, Polia, Rachil and Riva. They were born in Kagula on the outskirts of Kiliya [230 km from Kishinev, at the border with Romania]. In the late 1890s the family moved to Kishinev. I think my grandfather decided that it was going to be easier for his children to get education in a big town. My mother was born in 1888. As for the others, I don't remember their dates of birth. The boys finished cheder and the girls studied with a melamed at home. My mother's brothers and sisters later studied in grammar schools and in colleges. They lived in their own houses and kept livestock. Isaac, Srul, Shmil and my mother Molka inherited their father's business. They owned a company called Zinger-Dorfman. My grandparents' children received a very good education. They were involved in politics, some were journalists, others accountants and merchants. It's hard for me to remember exactly what each of them did for a living, but they were all decent people with a good income.

I remember Liya, my mother's older sister. I think she was born in 1880. She married a merchant and lived with him in Leovo town [90 km from Kishinev], on the bank of the Prut River. She had several children whom I don't remember. When her husband died they moved in with my grandmother and grandfather in Kishinev. Aunt Liya perished in Kishinev in 1941. The rest of my mother's brothers and sisters also perished there. The Soviet authorities arrested my mother's

older brother Isaac on some political, bourgeois or Zionist charges. The children who stayed in Kishinev perished in 1941, and those, who managed to evacuate, moved all across the globe. Only my mother's sister Chiza survived. Her husband was a logistics employee in a frontier unit. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War [6](#) they managed to evacuate and after the war they returned to Kishinev. They died of old age in the 1960s. I also met with Isaac's son after the war. He was an accountant in a company in Lvov. He died in the 1970s. This was the end of the Zinger family.

My mother was born in Kagula town near Kiliya in 1888. She studied at home with a melamed like her sisters when they were small children. She studied Hebrew, Yiddish, Jewish history and the Torah. Then my mother studied in a Russian grammar school. She was very well-educated.

My mother was one of the founders of a Zionist organization [Revisionist Zionism] [7](#) in Bessarabia. She took part in congresses and meetings. She held the position of a commissar of the Jewish National Fund. This fund collected money for buying land in Palestine [Israel] and planting trees. Doctor Berber was the chairman of this Zionist organization. They received books from England and Jerusalem and distributed them among the committees. When my mother met my father in 1920 she was already an activist in this Zionist organization. She liked Mendel Dorfman, my future father, and so did her family.

Growing up

My parents had a large Jewish wedding celebration with a chuppah, rabbi and klezmer musicians in 1921. There were many guests. After their wedding my parents settled down in their own house. It wasn't a really big house, but there was nice furniture and pictures on the walls. I was born on 23rd May 1923.

My mother and father went to the Zinger synagogue founded by my grandfather on holidays. They had their own seats there. After the service we usually all visited my grandparents. My mother lit candles on Friday evenings and my father said prayers, but when my father had to work on Saturdays he skipped his religious duties. I remember that my mother often prayed. She had a prayer book. She did the cooking in our home and observed the kashrut. My mother also did her work with the Zionist organization, supported a Jewish school, a hospital and girls who wanted to step into some marital arrangements. She also traveled to other towns where she gave lectures. She was a very business-orientated woman.

We spoke Yiddish at home, but we were also fluent in Russian and Romanian, which was the state language. We had a large collection of Russian and Jewish books. They are all gone now, of course. We had Jewish books by the following writers: Chaim Chemirinskiy [1862-1917, author of fables in Yiddish], Shaul Chernikhovski [1875-1943, Yiddish poet], Elizar-David Finkel [1862-1943, translator, translated from classical and oriental, and modern European languages into Yiddish and Hebrew], Abraham Mapu [1808- 1867, creator of the modern Hebrew novel] and many others. We also had Russian classics by Dostoevskiy [8](#) and Pushkin [9](#) - expensive editions with imprinted bindings. We had many newspapers at home, too. We read the Bessarabian Word, Adevarul [Truth in Romanian] and the Jewish newspaper Unzere Tseyt [Our Time]. [Editor's note: daily newspapers that published political, cultural and business news of Kishinev.]

My sister Polia, Pesia in Jewish, was born in 1926. [Polia was her common name.] [10](#) My mother was always busy and my sister spent a lot of time with Grandfather Aaron and Aunt Liya. When my

parents were arrested in 1939 my sister stayed with my grandfather and aunt. They all perished in 1941.

I was a sickly child and my parents took me to the Black Sea in summer. I had malaria, inflammation of the tonsils, but it didn't keep me from playing with other boys or climbing trees. I studied in a Jewish school, the Tarbut [11](#), for four years, from the age of 6 to 10. We studied religion there, Hebrew, prayers and Jewish history. After finishing Jewish elementary school in 1933, I entered a Romanian grammar school for boys where I studied for four years. There were German, Russian, Bulgarian and Jewish children in that school. There were six Jewish boys in my class. There was a period in 1938, when the Romanian fascists came to power, and we [Jews] had to sit separately from other children. However, it didn't last long. We got along well with our schoolmates. There were religious classes for Christians at our school, but Jewish boys studied Jewish religion and history with another teacher.

I had my bar mitzvah at the age of 13. It was a big event that took place on 30th May 1936. I recited a prayer at the synagogue. The celebration lasted three days. On the first day my relatives got together for a celebration, the second day was for my friends and on the third day there was a celebration at school.

During the war

As soon as I learned to read I began to read newspapers and showed an interest in politics. I remember when Hitler came to power and when the fascists occupied Austria. Our company boycotted Germans; we simply didn't buy German goods. Jewish refugees came from Germany and Austria. There were meetings in synagogues appealing to Jews to unite. Jabotinsky [12](#) visited us and I heard him speak at a meeting near our synagogue. Other Zionist leaders and Jewish writers came to our town as well. The Jewish Theater staged performances. When the Romanians closed Jewish schools in 1938 my mother went to Bucharest and managed to convince the authorities there to open the schools again. The Romanian fascists blamed my mother that she used people's contributions for Israel to support the Soviet power instead since she was a communist. This wasn't true, of course. The Romanian authorities viewed communists as a threat to their regime and the accusation of favoring communists was a very serious issue at the time. There was a strong anti-Soviet propaganda. Newspapers described the horrors of Stalin's camps and the arrests of millions of innocent victims in the USSR [during the so-called Great Terror] [13](#) and we believed them because we knew that there was no smoke without fire. We understood that communists were decent people, but the regime in the USSR was horrific. Romanians were more loyal to Zionists. In general, we had an interesting life. We communicated with interesting people that visited our home.

The majority of the poor Jewish population of Moldavia and Bessarabia supported communism. We believed that during socialism there would be an 8- hour working day, that workers would get their salaries and that there would be no unemployment. Jewish communists sincerely believed in the Soviet power. However, my family thought it mandatory to move to Palestine. Palestine was an English colony, and in 1938 the English forbade to issue entry permits to Palestine. I was supposed to leave back then, I couldn't imagine living elsewhere, but on the land of our ancestors.

When World War II began in Poland in 1939 large numbers of Jewish refugees arrived in our area. They had hope in the Soviet Union. The Soviet troops came to this territory in 1940 and many

believed this was an escape from the horrors of fascism. In our family we didn't put all our trust into the Soviets, but we chose the less of the two evils - fascism or the Soviet Union - and turned to the latter, of course. We didn't know they were bandits and would kill, rob and put people into prison. On 7th July 1940 my parents and uncles, as well as many other people were arrested on charges of anti-Soviet behavior and Zionism.

In 1940 I was 17 and a student at the Assistant Engineer School. My parents wanted me to get a technical education. The Soviet authorities gave our school the status of a college. I was on vacation when my parents were arrested. Our neighbors sent me a message saying that I shouldn't show up at home since I might be arrested, too. I watched from a distance how they loaded money, gold, furniture and pictures onto trucks. They were communist officials who arrived in the area along with the Soviet army. They were traditionally called 'Easteners'. [Editor's note: the Soviet Union was east of Kishinev.] They moved into our houses. I was allowed to take my warm clothes when winter approached. When I returned in 1947 I found many houses, including ours, ruined.

There were many Jewish bosses that had just arrived from the East and many of the local communists also became big bosses. I stayed with my grandfather, Aunt Liya or Aunt Chiza, or at a friend's home. I didn't tell anyone at school that my parents had been arrested so that I could continue my studies. I only told a few of my closest friends.

I was allowed to bring some food to my parents, but I couldn't see them and they weren't allowed to have an attorney. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War, in late May 1941, eleven months after they had been arrested, I received a statement from a special meeting of the NKVD [14](#) about preventive punishment of particularly dangerous 'enemies' of the Soviet power. My parents were sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment and deprived of their right to correspond with their families. My mother was sentenced on the charges of being a Zionist and bourgeois chauvinist and my father was sentenced for being a capitalist. My father was sent to Karaganda camp [on the Gulag] [15](#), in Kazakhstan [2,800 km from Kiev] and my mother was sent to Solikamsk camp in the Ural. I wasn't allowed to visit my father and never saw him again. He died in 1942, but we only got to know this after we received his rehabilitation [16](#) papers some time after 1956. It was stated that he had cardiac insufficiency and tuberculosis and that he was buried in grave #31 at a certain location. We looked it up on a map, but couldn't find it. I was allowed to see my mother before her departure to Solikamsk. She looked exhausted, but she didn't lose her spirits. We promised each other to keep in touch.

I had finished three years of college when the war began on 22nd June 1941. Since I studied at the Construction Faculty I was summoned to the military registry office where they ordered me to take a construction group to the border to reinforce the borderline. This happened on 29th or 30th June 1941. We came to the border of Moldova and Romania in the vicinity of the Prut River. We didn't have any spades and there was a lot of mess and confusion around. There were about 500 construction workers in the area. We lived in barracks and had meals in canteens. We stayed on the border of Bessarabia for about a month. There were many Moldavian workers in my group. They fled to their homes. The rest of us had nowhere to go. We didn't get food and had no proper clothes. We were almost forgotten until Germans began to advance into the area where we were working. Then an order to retreat was given, but nobody knew where we were to go. There were about 50 of us left. We headed to Tiraspol from where we were sent to Odessa. From there we retreated with military troops and reached Rostov, which was about 1,000 kilometers from home.

From there we were sent to Stalingrad where we were accommodated in a stadium. We sometimes got to places by freight trains and sometimes by trucks. We suffered from lack of food. Everything was a mess. On the way from Odessa to Stalingrad we had to do whatever kind of work to get some food. We got into air raids and many perished. I survived.

We were mobilized to construction units. We were called 'Westerners' [residents of the areas occupied by Soviet troops in 1939-1940] and weren't sent to the front for fear of betrayal. From Stalingrad we were sent to Saratov. We were divided into groups of 5. My group was sent to harvest in a kolkhoz [17](#). In late autumn 1941 we were sent to Siberia where we were to work in the coal industry. I came to Kiselyovsk, Kemerovo region [over 3,000 km from Kiev]. It was a town of miners. Siberian mines had to produce lots of coal since Ukrainian mines in the Donetsk Basin had been seized by the fascists. In the beginning I worked as a laborer constructing houses for arrivals in the town until I became a foreman and then the manager of this construction site. I received a sheepskin jacket. Winters were cold there. I received special food coupons and lived in a room in a hostel. We got orders to carry out different tasks.

There were many prisoners-of-war coming to town and Jews who evacuated from Western regions, Kiev and Minsk. The Mindyuk Jewish family became my friends. There were no local Jews in Kiselyovsk. I don't know any Jews who observed Jewish traditions in this town. I supported some old miserable Jews who were in evacuation here. I didn't tell anybody that my parents were in prison. People didn't ask questions about families during the war. I corresponded with my mother through an acquaintance in Moscow. My mother was allowed to write one letter every three months. She planted trees first, but then she was given work at a cultural department in the Solikamsk camp. She worked with letters and other documents and then she worked at the camp library and made arrangements for celebrations of Soviet holidays. She read out newspaper articles with news from the front to inmates of the camp. My mother's Zionist convictions didn't change. Life in the camp was very hard, particularly for my mother who was over 50, but she admired her new friends that were imprisoned for their political views. My mother supported Jewish inmates of the camp. Whenever I got a chance I sent her money. In 1943 we could write more letters to one another and I could even send her photographs.

I remember Victory Day [18](#) on 9th May 1945. Due to the time difference we heard about the capitulation of Germany at night. It was such great news. People shouted 'Hurrah!' in the streets and were hugging each other. There was a meeting and the secretary of the regional Party committee said that we had to continue working. However, the war continued in the East and Soviet troops were fighting the war with Japan [19](#).

Post-war

Kishinev was liberated in 1944 and I began to write letters to my college to continue my studies. In 1945 I received an invitation from the college to continue my studies in the 4th year. I got released from work in late 1946 and could leave for Kishinev. When I arrived in Kishinev I got lodging in the bathroom of the hostel of the college. I returned all my clothing that I received at work when I quit my position in Kiselyovsk and therefore didn't have any belongings. I bought a blanket at a market in Kishinev and this was my only belonging. I finished my studies at the extramural department of the college.

The town was ruined and there was a great demand for construction workers. I got a job at a cooperative [association of small business enterprises] where I was capital construction manager. I was responsible for the reconstruction of smaller plants. I worked there for a year hoping that they would give me an apartment, but it didn't happen. Many Jews returned from evacuation and many of them moved to bigger towns. I remember a party dedicated to the memory of Sholem Aleichem. The Jewish Theater began to give performances again. The synagogues were ruined.

My mother was released from Solikamsk camp in 1947 before the end of her term. She returned to Kishinev. I already had an apartment by that time. I paid some money to a family who moved out of their small two-bedroom apartment in an old house. I was happy that my mother was back. She remained a convinced Zionist. She communicated with other Jews who shared her ideas. My mother met writers, historians and actors of Jewish theaters. There was a stamp in my mother's passport forbidding her to reside in 24 bigger towns. She had a so-called 'passport 24' [20](#) and Kishinev was included on that list. My mother couldn't obtain a residential permit [21](#) for a long time, so we decided that she would 'lose' her old passport and buy a new one that cost a lot of money. We did so and she obtained a permit. We lived together.

I went to work and was an extramural student at the Faculty of Construction Materials of Moscow Construction College. My mother remained free until 1949 when our neighbors reported on us, stating that there were frequent Jewish gatherings in our apartment. After the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [22](#) was dismissed all Jewish activists, including my mother, were arrested. This period was called 'campaign against cosmopolitans' [23](#), though my mother was by no means a cosmopolitan. She was more likely a chauvinist. Some officers came to search our house at night, but they didn't find anything. My mother was ordered to pack her warm clothes and go with them in a black car. We understood that she was going to prison. She was accused of Zionism and chauvinism. She was sent into exile in Long Bridge camp in Krasnoyarsk region, Siberia, for eight years. I wasn't allowed to see her before her departure and she wasn't allowed to have a lawyer. My mother had many friends in the camp. She made friends easily. She was too old to do hard work and was therefore given minor chores: sewing and darning clothes, knitting and housekeeping. She rarely wrote to me.

I was chief of the housing department of the town and after my mother was arrested I could have easily been fired. I started having problems. I was responsible for setting priorities as to which facility was to be reconstructed first. My friend Gaisiner, a Jew, and I were working on the reconstruction of Chabatovskaya synagogue in Yakimovskiy Lane. People began to send letters complaining that instead of reconstructing houses we were working at the synagogue. My poor friend was even imprisoned for this. The reconstruction of this synagogue stopped and my friend was released, but I had to leave Kishinev as soon as possible.

I witnessed another tragic event in Kishinev. Many Moldavian and Ukrainian families were deported from their homes during this period [1947-1949]. They were wealthy families who worked hard to make a decent living. After the Great Patriotic War they recovered their wealth, but they didn't want to join collective farms. I don't think they really had much to give away at that time, but the state wanted to take away their grain stocks. I was to be the representative of my company responsible for collecting grain stocks. There were two NKVD officers to escort me and we were to go to the villagers, who were told that resisting to deliver food supplies made them enemies of the Soviet power. NKVD officers had the list of villagers and I was just supposed to attend these

actions. If a family wasn't at home we went to another house. Families were taken by cattle transportation trains. They were given no time to get ready for the trip. I don't know exactly where they were taken - I believe, somewhere to the north. I never met anybody who returned home from there. It was the period of a horrific famine. People were starving to death. There were many dead people in towns and villages.

So, I decided to leave Kishinev in 1949. Itzhak Zinger, my cousin, the son of my mother's brother, lived in Lvov. He was a chief accountant there and began to look for an apartment that I could exchange for my apartment in Kishinev. I was lucky and soon moved to Lvov. [Editor's note: exchanging apartments was the only way one could get another apartment. They were not in private ownership, but belonged to the state, so they could not be sold.] I moved my sofa and other stuff into my new apartment. There was a bathroom and a kitchen in this apartment and this was more than I could dream of. I was lucky to get a job as the chief engineer of the Housing Department of Leninskiy [today Shevchenko] district in Lvov. I also became the chief of the Capital Construction of Pharmacies.

Married life

Soon afterwards I met Betia Rechister, a pretty Jewish girl, born in 1927. She had recently graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Philology of Lvov University. Her family came from Tulchin, Vinnitsa region. Her father owned some stores before the Revolution of 1917. During the Soviet regime he didn't have the right to vote and his children weren't allowed to study in higher educational institutions. He moved to Tashkent, Middle Asia, where nobody knew him in the 1920s. He became an apprentice to a locksmith and later brought his family there.

There were three children in the family: David, the oldest brother, my wife Betia and Chaim, her younger brother. They bought a house in Tashkent and had a good life, but due to the bad climate they returned to Vinnitsa region before the Great Patriotic War. Something didn't work out there and they moved to their relatives in Poltava. They bought a house in Poltava. Betia's older brother finished secondary school when the war began. Betia's father worked as a mechanic at a company. The company evacuated to Samarkand, Middle Asia. Betia's family stayed there during the war. My wife finished school with honors there.

After the war Betia moved to Kharkov where she entered the Foreign Languages College. Her parents went to Lvov where they received an apartment somehow. They weren't a religious family. They spoke Russian. They knew all traditions, but they didn't observe any. In 1950 Betia got a transfer to Lvov University. She graduated from it and stayed to work as a lecturer at the Linguistics Department. I was a bachelor and I was handsome. I met Betia's father at work. He liked me and invited me to dinner once. I met his daughter and liked her. Since I was 28 I had to think about my future. Betia was 24. We had much in common. We both loved music, theater, poetry and tourism. We got married in 1952. We had a civil ceremony in a registry office. We went to live in my apartment. We have been together for over 50 years now. We have a good marriage. We've traveled all across the globe together.

In 1952 the struggle of the Soviets against Jews entered a new phase. It was the so-called Doctors' Plot' [24](#). My wife lost her job at the university. Many Jews were fired at that time. Betia's parents, my wife and I understood the stupidity and tyranny of the situation, but this understanding didn't cross the threshold of our apartment. Betia managed to get a job at school. She worked as an

English teacher at school until she retired.

I remember March 1953 when Stalin died. We were happy that the tyrant had passed away and were hoping that my mother would be returning home soon. I never joined the Communist Party or even had any desire to do so. Besides, being the son of an 'enemy of the people' I would have never been admitted. Perhaps, I would have made a different career if I had been a communist, but I can't complain. I worked as the manager of the Housing Department and was the chief engineer of the Lvov Opera Theater when the building was under reconstruction.

Our son Michael, named after my father, was born in Lvov in 1954 and our daughter Rita followed two years later. We named her after Betia's mother who had passed away by then. My mother returned in 1957. She was rehabilitated and released. She lived with us in Lvov. She helped us to look after our children. As usual there were Jews around her. They didn't observe any Jewish traditions, but they got together to discuss subjects that were of interest to them. My mother was quite a good storyteller. She read books to others and organized clubs. Her group was afraid of arrests, but they got together nonetheless. My mother corresponded with former inmates of the camps. She received dozens of letters. However, my mother's health condition got worse. She died of a stroke one day in 1962. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery. Her name and my father's name are engraved in Russian and Yiddish on her gravestone. I go to the graveyard, say a prayer four times a year and honor my parents' memory on commemoration days. I also commemorate my grandmother and grandfather. I have an obedient Jewish soul and I've always observed Jewish traditions and holidays. I went to the synagogue when I didn't have to work, and I prayed at home. I went to the synagogue at least once a week when I was busy, but when I had an opportunity I went there every day. I fast, go to the synagogue and say a prayer on Yom Kippur. My wife and I spend the whole day in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. In the past this was usually a working day, so we used to fast and pray at home.

I'm glad that my wife and children shared my convictions and faith. We always followed the kashrut when we had the opportunity. There were times when we couldn't get any kosher food, but now we observe the rules strictly. We've observed Jewish holidays and discussed all Jewish subjects in the family. Our children studied Jewish history and culture with us. They enjoyed observing holidays with us and I told them about Jewish traditions and culture and taught them the prayers. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays. The only good thing about them was that they were days off. We liked traveling and traveled all over the Soviet Union. We've been to the Baltic Republics, on the Baikal, in the North and in the South.

I've always been involved in Jewish public activities. During the Soviet regime I distributed Jewish publications and books. An underground Jewish printing house published Zionist flyers and books from America and Israel that we translated into Russian. I delivered those publications to houses offering them to people. Some people bought them and others were even afraid of opening their doors to a stranger. I knew all Jews in town who weren't ashamed of revealing their Jewish identity and who attended the synagogue. My colleagues knew that I was religious and went to the synagogue. I delivered matzah to Jews who were afraid of being noticed by their neighbors. We received matzah from Odessa where it was delivered to from Moscow.

The New Hasidic Synagogue, the only operating synagogue in Lvov, was closed in 1963. The building was given to a sports club. It was a shock, of course. The main reason for this act was that

the best hotel in Lvov was built in this part of town. Diplomats and journalists stayed there and the town authorities thought that Jews passing by would spoil the impression. They collected signatures against the synagogue. By the way, many 'decent' Jews signed this paper. Religious Jews began to get together for a prayer in private houses. There were gatherings of 10-15 Jewish men. We had a rabbi called Zilberfarb who conducted our gatherings. He was an old man then. He was allowed to move to Israel with his family in the late 1960s. He died in Israel. His children live there now.

I put pressure on the town authorities to return the synagogue to Jews, but they refused. I continued to pursue my Jewish activities and became the fund keeper of our small Jewish community. Every member of this community made a contribution and I put this money into my account. We distributed the only Jewish magazine published in the Soviet Union, Sovyetische Heymland [Yiddish paper called Soviet Motherland]. A secretary of the Jewish Publishing House came to our meeting and said: 'If we have no readers the magazine will cease publication. Each of you must find five subscribers'. I decided to use my position. I was the chief engineer of the Regional Pharmacy Department, which was a big organization. Whenever a Jew came to my office with a request I said: 'Here is the subscription receipt for a Jewish magazine - if you subscribe to it I shall do as you want'. We managed to convince 140 Jews to subscribe to the magazine, while there were only 20 previously. Many Jews refused to read the magazine. All of those who didn't want to reveal their identity back then are in Israel today.

Our son Michael became a student at Lvov Medical College, but he quit when he was a 4th-year student. He had anti-Soviet convictions. He stuck to his Jewish identity and studied Hebrew and Jewish history. There was a group of young men who were like him. They observed Jewish holidays and attended the synagogue. They were persecuted by the militia. Michael moved to Israel in 1978. He publishes a few newspapers in Russian in Beer Sheva. He speaks fluent Hebrew [Ivrit]. He's a public activist in Israel. He has a wife and a daughter called Sarra.

Our daughter Rita finished Lvov Medical College. She's a pharmacist. She has two sons. Her older son, Sania, is a 3rd-year student at the Medical College. He finished a Jewish school, which is financed by a rabbi. Her younger son, Zhenia, also went to a Jewish school first, but the level of teaching there leaves much to be desired nowadays, and so he went to a Ukrainian school with advanced studies of mathematics. My grandsons attend the synagogue; they are religious. They had their bar mitzvah, and they spend their vacations in Jewish summer camps. My older grandson studied in Israel under a student exchange program.

I retired about 16 years ago. I was happy to resign. I have all my time for myself now and can spend more time promoting the Jewish movement. I was a member of the board of the Sholem Aleichem Society [25](#) for six years. I attended conferences in Kiev and studied at the Moscow affiliate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I attended a number of congresses as a Jewish representative from Ukraine. My wife became a teacher of Hebrew. She is the director of a Jewish Sunday school, which has been operating in Lvov for twelve years. Our family takes an active part in the work at this school. Of course, most of our students come from mixed marriages, but we have a curriculum and teach Hebrew, Jewish traditions, holidays, songs and dances.

I am grateful for perestroika. Of course, life is difficult now, but Jewish life has revived. We've come out of the underground. There are synagogues and Jewish organizations. My wife and I have

traveled to England, Holland and Germany at the invitation of various Jewish organizations. We spent five days in London. I spoke at a meeting and gave interviews to radio and newspaper reporters. I understand that Yiddish is my main language. One can manage anywhere if there's a Jew who knows Yiddish.

I work as a guide on a 6-hour 'Jewish Lvov' bus tour. There's a lot to tell about Lvov. There were three religious movements here: the Hasidim [26](#), Orthodox and Neolog Jews. There used to be many synagogues: smaller and bigger ones, and every guild used to have its own synagogue. Pavel, an architect from Rome, built a synagogue in the center of town in 1582. People call this synagogue Golden Rose. It was a magnificent building and a popular place among Jews. In 1942 this synagogue was destroyed by the Germans. There were only ruins left. After the war local residents began to steal everything they could: wooden structures, bricks and decorations. There are only one and a half walls left, but still it's a world heritage site. It's included in the UNESCO list. It will probably be restored one day, but until then the Golden Rose only remains in the memory of many old residents of Lvov and in pictures by Lvov artists.

The New Hasidic Synagogue, built 200 years ago, was given back to Jews. It houses the Sholem Aleichem Society, the Lvov Hesed and our Sunday school. I avoid Hesed. I struggle against those that recently joined the Jewish community. They don't know Yiddish or Jewish traditions. They are guided by money.

I've traveled to Israel many times. I like it there. It's a beautiful country and its residents are wonderful people, but there is nothing for me there. I also spoke at a university in Israel, but I'm still treated as a second-class citizen there. Here, however, I can be of use. I tell visitors from other countries about our Jewish people and I give lectures at various Jewish organizations.

Glossary

1 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

2 Bessarabia

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an

independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

3 St

George Cross: Established in Russia in 1769 for distinguished military merits of officers and generals, and, from 1807, of soldiers and corporals. Until 1913 it was officially referred to as Distinction Military Order, from 1913 as St. George Cross. Servicemen awarded with St. George Crosses of all four degrees were called St. George Cavaliers.

4 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.

5 Kulaks

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

6 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

7 Revisionist Zionism

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

8 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

9 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

10 Common name

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

11 Tarbut schools

Elementary, secondary and technical schools maintained by the Hebrew educational and cultural organization called Tarbut. Most Eastern European countries had such schools between the two world wars but there were especially many in Poland. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the education was Zionist oriented.

12 Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940)

Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

13 Great Terror (1934-1938)

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

14 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

15 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

16 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

17 Kolkhoz

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

18 Victory Day in Russia

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

19 War with Japan

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

20 Passport 24

Such passports were issued to people that authorities didn't put full trust into: they were former political prisoners or those that had recently arrived in the USSR, etc. There was a note in such passports stating that the owner of that passport was not allowed to reside in the 24 biggest towns of the USSR.

21 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.

22 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

23 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained

ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

24 Doctors' Plot

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

25 Sholem Aleichem Society in Ukraine

The first Jewish associations were established in many towns of the country in the early 1990s. Many of them were called Sholem Aleichem Society. They had educational and cultural goals. Their purpose was to make assimilated Soviet Jews interested in the history and culture of their people, opening Jewish schools, kindergartens, libraries, literature and historical clubs.

26 Hasid

The follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.