

Rakhil Givand-Tikhaya

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Kiev

Ukraine

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My family background

My name is Givand Rakhil Grigoriyevna, and I was born on January 23, 1928, in Kiev.

My parents, Gersh Shimonovich Givand and Rebecca Yakovlevna Givand, lived in downtown Kiev on

Tarasovskaya Street, while my mother's mother, my grandmother, Sonya Eidelman, lived in a private house on the left bank of the Dnieper River, in an area called Slobodka.

My great-grandmother, Genya Grubman, also lived in that house. I remember her very well. She was very old, but was always glad to see me. She often told me stories about the histories, traditions and religions of Jewish folk. At home, my great-grandmother no longer worked around the house, but she was a very wise woman, and many people turned to her for advice on how to deal with one or another of life's situations. Great-grandmother was very religious. I don't remember how religious holidays were celebrated at her house, but I know for sure that all the Jewish traditions were kept very strictly while she was still alive.

She had a special place in the synagogue. She read the Torah out loud and other women repeated the passages after her. She was one of the few women there who could read and understand the Torah, so she read it for the other women who came together in the synagogue, and then explained it to them.

My great-grandmother died in 1936. I remember her funeral very well, first of all, because it was the first funeral ceremony I had ever attended, and secondly, because it was carried out according to Jewish traditions. I remember entering the house on the day of the funeral and saying "Hello" to everyone. An old Jewish man replied, "Child, you should not say 'hello' today - you have a dead body in your house". My great-grandmother was lying on the floor, on straw, with no coffin. The ceremony included neither music nor flowers. Two candles were lit behind her head and prayers were read out loud by the men, while the women listened from another room. Great-grandmother



was taken to the cemetery without a coffin and was buried wrapped in a cloth. I remember that the men said many, many prayers that day, in a language I could not understand. I also remember that my grandmother and my mother tore their dresses. My mother explained to me that this was done in accordance with Jewish law.

My grandmother, Sonya Eidelman (maiden name: Grubman), also lived in Slobodka. I never knew my grandfather, as I was born after he died.

I know about my grandfather from the stories told by my mother. His name was Yakov Eidelman. I believe he had no education, but by nature was a very gifted person. He worked with his hands and was involved in commerce. Before the Revolution, he was quite rich. He had lived in America, where he had run his own business. People said he even owned his own houses there. He wanted his wife and children to join him there, but since his wife was very ill and doctors had forbidden her to cross the ocean on a steamship, he had to return to Russia.

In Slobodka the family owned a house and a shop. The shop traded in foodstuffs and necessities. My grandfather was very prosperous. The shop was located in their house. Many residents of Slobodka, both Jews and Ukrainians, bought products from his shop and treated my grandfather and his family with great respect.

My grandfather was very religious. When he left America, he brought back with him a lot of different talit, as well as other religious objects for the synagogue. My mother said that he would always wear a yarmulke and a hat. His day always started with prayer. In his house, they always kept Sabbath and every Jewish holiday. Grandmother was also very religious, and they both attended a synagogue in Slobodka. There were two synagogues in Slobodka at that time, but I remember only one of them, the big one. It was directly across from the tram stop where we got off when we came from the town. Every Saturday, my grandfather went to this synagogue.

Jewish pogroms began during the Civil War (1917-1922). It happened in 1918 or 1919. The army of General Denikin was in Kiev then, and its soldiers attacked and ruined Jewish homes, killing men, raping women, and confiscating and destroying property. During the pogroms the Jews would hide in their houses and basements, but my grandfather was a courageous man, who feared nothing and was convinced that nothing would touch his family because the local Ukrainian population was very nice to him. He hoped they would protect him. But as it happened, no one had time to protect him for a soldier suddenly ran up to his house, stabbed him three times and left. My grandfather lost a lot of blood and died right there, at the doorway of his house.

My grandparents had four daughters and a son. The eldest daughter and the son died as babies from scarlet fever; I don't even know their names. Three daughters were left: Tatiana, who was born in 1902, my mother, who was born in 1904, and Maria, who was born in 1913.

Before getting married all of them lived in grandfather's house in Slobodka. I remember that house very well. In the beginning of the 1930s the house was remodeled. In the old house all the rooms were small, while in the remodeled house they were united and made large. The house was made of wood with an iron roof; there were two porches that faced the street and the backyard. There were four large rooms and a kitchen. The toilet and the well were outside. The house had good wooden furniture, for my grandparents were not poor. There were also nice bronze candleholders and

beautiful silver dishes.

They had no garden in the yard, but auxiliary premises and a barn with two cows. I remember these very well because every time we came to visit I always had fresh milk to drink.

My grandmother had no servants; she had to work around the house on her own. That is why when grandfather died, my mother and her sisters had to start helping around the house, milking the cows, and selling the milk in order to survive. This is all I know and remember about my relatives on my mother's side.

My father, Gersh Shimonovich Givand, was born in 1904 in the town of Volodarka, outside Belaya Tserkov, in the area of Kiev. His parents, my grandparents, Shimon and Anna Givand, were also killed in pogroms. Besides that, my father's elder sister Rukhlya was also killed. The pogroms were terrible; entire Jewish families were murdered. I cannot tell you about their deaths in more detail because my father never told me much, sparing my childish sensibility.

I know that following that pogrom three brothers remained: my father was the eldest, then came Israel, born in 1908, and finally the youngest - Naum, born in 1912.

An interesting incident in the life of the middle brother, Israel, follows. During one of the pogroms, when Jews were being killed, a rich neighbor, whose name I don't know, had hidden his money in Israel's shoe. Nobody knows what happened to that man, he may have been killed, too, but his money remained in Israel's shoe. Once, when Israel saw that General Denikin's soldiers wanted to throw his neighbor Lipa Novichenko into a well, Israel ran up to them and said, "I will give you money, if you'll just let this man go". The soldiers took the money and let Lipa go, and Lipa bowed down with gratitude before my father and his brothers for the rest of his life; he also helped them a lot.

After they lost their parents, the brothers were put into an orphanage, but I don't remember much about that time. I know that Lipa helped them a lot, including with their education. Unfortunately, all three brothers were killed in the Second World War.

My father finished forestry college around 1927, and then worked in an organization that dealt with the transportation of wood. He had a good position and our material life was pretty good.

My mother had no secondary education, because after the death of her father she had to stop studying in order to help in the shop and around the house.

Growing up

I don't know how my parents met, but when they married they moved to No. 16, Tarasovskaya Street. My father worked at a plant then and he was given a room in a basement. That's where I was born. It was in the city center, and "kikes" ¹ were forbidden to live in that street. I can remember the sign that said that - it was fixed to one of our houses. Later, we moved to another flat on the same street, in house No. 8.

The room was in a communal flat, and was quite large. We had good furniture for that time, and many books, including books in Yiddish; it also had a piano, which I was learning to play. Apart from us, there were five more neighbor families in the flat. We had a communal kitchen with a table, and

a closet for each family. There were two toilets, but they were communal, so in the mornings we sometimes had to queue. We had a common electricity-meter, and every family paid according to the number of people in each. The relations between the neighbors were quite peaceful; I don't mean that we were all friends, but we never quarreled.

In general, we had mostly Jewish families in our flat, but there was also one German.

I remember one old Jew, our neighbor, who lived alone. Everyone called him grandfather Nudelman. I loved him very much. He was very religious, and he taught me Yiddish. He told me, "If you mom does not want to tell you something in Yiddish, come to me." So, I learned my first Yiddish words from him. My parents spoke Yiddish only when they did not want me to understand, so every time it happened, I ran to grandfather Nudelman and he translated for me what they had said.

At our house we did not celebrate any Jewish holidays because my father was a member of the Communist Party and feared that someone at his workplace might learn that he celebrated Jewish holidays at home and report him to the authorities. My mother exchanged whispers with grandfather Nudelman and arranged religious celebrations on their own. On Pessach, she would bring matzoh from grandmother, and the family would celebrate this holiday with grandfather Nudelman. During the Second World War. Grandfather Nudelman was killed in Babi Yar (site of mass killings of Jews by Germans in Kiev).

But I remember very well how Jewish holidays were celebrated at my grandmother's in Slobodka. On Pesach, all of her daughters with their children would come together. On the eve of the Passover they would take out all the bread, and wash and clean the entire flat. Then from the attic they would take special kosher plates that were kept there in special boxes during the whole year. They put matzoh, boiled potatoes, horse-radishes, boiled eggs, fish and everything else that was necessary on the table. I don't remember who led the seder or how, but I remember how nice it was afterwards. My grandmother had a gramophone on which she played Jewish records with songs on them, and we enjoyed ourselves. I don't remember the other holidays much. I remember that on Yom Kippur my mother always fasted, but I did not understand why. I also know that the husband of my mother's sister Tatiana attended the synagogue regularly until it was closed a year or two before the war [World War II]. Then he began to go to a house where Jewish men came together to pray.

My school years

In 1935 I started going to school, a Russian school. But there were children of different nationalities among the students: Russian, Ukrainian, and many Jewish. I was a very good student; I liked studying very much. My favorite subjects were humanities - literature and history. We also had teachers of different nationalities, and the Jewish children at school never sensed any anti-Semitism. For friends, I had children of different nationalities, and we all were equal. I had music classes with a teacher at home, and our German neighbor taught me the German language. I don't know how she would have reacted to the war and to fascism because she died before the war began, in 1938.

I was a young Pioneer and sang in the school band. I liked to wear the red Pioneer tie, and liked all the Pioneer demonstrations and ceremonies. But I never went to the Pioneer summer camps, I always spent summers with my mother. We sang Soviet songs, both Russian and Ukrainian, and

performed at amateur concerts. We even won prizes at school.

My father liked it very much. We always celebrated Soviet holidays at home - the Great October Revolution Day, and May Day, on May 1. My father liked big celebrations, so they invited a lot of guests, no matter what their nationality was. They had friends among the Russians and Ukrainians too. Relations between people of different nationalities were good back then. Tables were full of delicious food, because my father liked when people said, "Look, how Givand celebrates this holiday." He emphasized celebrations on Soviet rather than Jewish holidays, because repression and arrests started in those years, and he was frightened. My mother was concerned over the fact that she could not celebrate any Jewish holidays at home, and, as I mentioned before, she would bring matzoh from Slobodka and would celebrate the Jewish holidays with grandfather Nudelman. I remember very well how I was warned not to tell anyone that we had matzoh at our house. By the way, not only Jews were afraid to celebrate their national holidays. I don't remember any Russian or Ukrainian children bringing Easter cakes on Easter. Their parents were also afraid that somebody might learn that they celebrated religious holidays. In those days the practice of any religion was outside the law.

In 1937 repression and arrests started. I remember this very well because we had a chair next to the door in our room, and a white bag was always lying on that chair. There was always fresh bread and some underwear in that bag - my mother was preparing for an arrest. Many Soviet workers, even common people, were arrested back then, including some of our friends, but praise God, my father was spared.

In general, I had a happy childhood. I went to school, my family had no financial need, and I was dearly loved by my parents, because I had no brothers or sisters. My mother took me to resorts, for instance, to Zheleznovodsk. In summer, my parents often rented dachas outside Kiev - in Irpen or Vorzel. My father received special tickets at work for rest in health centers and rest homes. So, in general, our life was good.

During the war

I knew nothing about Hitler or fascism. We were never told about it at school. Perhaps the senior students knew something about fascism, but we were too young to know. My parents probably knew about fascism and the threat of war, and were concerned, but they spared me and did not tell me anything - until the war broke out, my childhood was marred by nothing.

On June 22, 1941, shells and bombs began to explode in the sky over Kiev, and my mother would call me at the balcony and tell me, "Look, military exercises are underway". A little later, German bombs began to explode.

One morning, there was a ring at the door, and my father was given a call-up paper from the military enlistment committee. He was an officer, who was in charge of political ideology in the army. But he was in the reserves, because the first time he had been called up was in 1939 during the Finnish War. Afterwards he was left in Kiev because peace was signed and he was too late to be sent to the front. This time, since he was an officer in political ideology, he was taken to work on the mobilization of people. People born in his year - 1904 - had not been called up yet, so he worked with the enlistment committee. But when he heard that both of his younger brothers

were called up, he did not think it possible to stay in Kiev and went to fight with them. None of them came back.

It so happened that we did not even have a chance to say goodbye to my father. This is how it happened. As soon as the war broke out, my mother and I began to prepare for evacuation. My father told us that we would need to leave because Hitler would kill all the Jews - he already knew about it. Our mood was terrible. It was scary. I remember there were a lot of refugees from the western regions of Ukraine in Kiev, mostly Jews. They were settled in the Botanical Garden, not far from our house. It was awful to look at them: old men, women and children, who had already seen the atrocities of the fascists. They lived on the bare ground, in tents. My mother often went to see them, to give them some food and to talk to them. I remember she cried a lot. That is why there was no question in our family about whether we should evacuate or not. We knew about the fascists; certainly, we did not know what degree their persecutions would reach, but had learned enough to be frightened badly.

The main question was how to evacuate from Kiev quickly with our relatives. Even though the government already knew about the atrocities committed by the fascists against the Jews, no special Jewish evacuation was organized.

The husband of my mother's elder sister Tatiana Ofman worked in Darnitsa at the train station. He arranged for us to be put on the train and taken to evacuation. My uncle came to pick us up and put us on the train, and there we waited for several days. We did not take many belongings with us because we thought we were only leaving for a week or two. We just took along some bed linen, my blanket, some clothes, and food - as much as a woman and a girl could carry. My mother kept looking out of the train windows to see if my father was coming. But my uncle told her, "Riva, don't wait for Grisha." He told us that my father had gone to the front as a volunteer and purposely did not come to say goodbye to us. He had told my uncle, "If I come to say goodbye to Khila and Riva, I will not be able to leave them. I will die with them." Neither of his brothers - Israel or Naum - came to say goodbye to us either. They all left, and they all were killed.

We, however, went on to evacuation. With us we had mother's elder sister Tatiana Ofman with her children, Yelizaveta and Abram, along with mother's younger sister Maria Vodotiyevskaya with her children, Viktoria and Yakov, and grandmother, mother's mother.

The families of my father's brothers, that is, the families of Israel and Naum stayed in Kiev - they were too late to move out. Both families lived in one big flat, which occupied the whole floor of a house. There were 15 of them. One of the relatives worked in the People's Commissariat of the Interior, and she was promised a car to evacuate her family. But when the car was provided, it was too late, Kiev was already encircled. They had to return and all of them were murdered at Babi Yar.

We traveled in heated railway cars and stopped first in Lozovaya. There was a terrible bombing raid there. For some time we lived in Lozovaya - my mother worked there on a collective farm and I helped her. But this did not last long. Soon, we were put on open railway platforms next to some machine-guns and taken to Stalingrad and then to Perm. In the beginning we lived at the Perm train station. Each of us had a corner in which to keep our belongings. We received a piece of bread every day and some sort of soup. We washed in the toilet room at the station. During the day, our mothers cleaned and washed floors at the station. It was very hard living there, but we could not

leave because my cousin Yelizaveta fell sick with measles and was in Perm's hospital. We could not leave without her.

And there we were on that terrible day of September 29, 1941, when our troops surrendered Kiev. It was Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment, and all the adults, all the Jews who were at the train station fasted. I also fasted for the first time in my life, and since that time I have been keeping this fast every year of my life. I still remember that day, when all of us, roofless, fatherless, miserable Jews, were fasting and praying for our nation, for victory, for our fathers to come home alive, for our Motherland. It was very hard because on the eve of the fast we ate some salty fish and we were very thirsty, but we could not drink, for it was forbidden. All of us endured - we thought if we endured, everything would be okay.

Then we wandered around the country. We stayed in Kokanda, where I got ill with meningitis and missed two years of school because of it. Living there was very hard - my mother worked at the collective farm to survive. I remember being hungry all the time: we woke up and went to bed hungry. When I was ill, my mother sold everything we had in order to buy penicillin, otherwise I would have died. So, we were left with nothing - not even a bed-sheet or blanket. The only valuable my mother had was her wedding ring, and she could not let it go. For a long time I walked on crutches because my legs became infected and would not move.

At that time, the wife of Lipa Novichenko, who was rescued by Israel, found us. Lipa was no longer living, and his wife's second husband, Georgy Ivanovich Geshko, was the director of a film studio. He was Ukrainian, but he helped us a lot. They took us to Tashkent and gave my mother work in the studio's canteen; I went to school and our life became easier. I attended a regular secondary school, but there were many evacuated Jewish children there. We stayed with a Russian family, renting a part of a room from them. Everyone treated us with compassion, and I don't remember being offended by anyone despite our Jewish origin. We had no news from my father or his brothers, but my mother and I lived with the hope that he was still alive.

During our evacuation in Tashkent, we learned about Babi Yar and the tragic fate of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the occupied territories, as well as the fate of Isaac's and Naum's families.

As soon as Kiev was liberated we decided to go home, even though we knew there was nowhere to go. We knew this because Mr. Geshko went to Kiev immediately after its liberation on November 8, 1943, and from there immediately wrote us a letter. He had visited us there before the war, so he went to see in what kind of condition our house was. It was gone. There was an ammunition warehouse next to it, and when the Germans were retreating, they blew it up, so that every house around it was also burnt down.

We returned to Kiev together with the film studio. We traveled in good railway cars, but when we arrived, we had nowhere to stay.

We were given shelter by our neighbors, the Rymars, a Russian family which showed us a lot of compassion, and we stayed in their basement for a long time. We had no possessions of our own: only one pair of shoes and 100 rubles. A loaf of bread at the market cost 100 rubles. The Rymar family saved us at that time. During the occupation they stayed in Kiev, and they told us all the details about Babi Yar and related to us the horrors of the occupation. Their life was not easy either,

because some of their ancestors were Jewish, and they also had to hide in Kiev.

In 1945 I received a letter concerning the death certificate of my father, and later, another one concerning the deaths of his brothers Israel and Naum Givand. Because their families were dead, there was nobody else to receive those letters. The brothers were killed somewhere outside Kremenchug during the first year of the war.

Post-war

In 1945 I attended a Russian school, but not the same one I had attended earlier. In this school I learned all about anti-Semitism. Among the students, there were many Jewish children who had returned from evacuation. The attitude of the non-Jewish children to us was horrible - the word "kike" could be heard on every step. Our teachers also secretly supported the anti-Semites, offending us, and telling us that we had had a good time in Tashkent during the war - they said that to us, who lost our fathers. They gave lower grades to the Jewish children, and constantly found fault with us. We had a girl in our class who managed to escape from Babi Yar. I don't remember her name, I only know that somehow she had crawled out alive. She was teased, called a kike, and nobody had any compassion for her - neither students, nor teachers. I still remember my after-war school years with horror.

My mother continued to work at the film studio's canteen, and its director continued to take care of us. We were given a room in a communal flat on Gorky Street, and we lived there for many years.

In 1948 I finished school and enrolled at the Light Industry Institute (the University). I had entry privileges at the university because my father was killed in the war, and I passed all my exams with excellent marks.

The beginning of the 1950s marks the start of an openly anti-Semitic campaign known as the "Doctors' Case" and the fight against the cosmopolitans. When Stalin died in 1953, I was part of the guard of honor near his portrait. We certainly did not link the government's policy against the Jews and all the repressions of the Soviet people with Stalin's name. This policy of anti-Semitism certainly affected all of us Jewish students. Most of all, we felt it when graduates were sent to certain places of work after graduation. In those years, after graduation from a university, we could not work just anywhere, but had to work for three years at any place the university would send us.

I graduated from the university with honors, and according to the rules I was supposed to be offered a good position, but I was one of the last to be called up, and was offered a position in Siberia. This I refused, because I could not leave my mother alone, so I did not sign the paper. This process was repeated several times, until finally, I was sent to Kishenev, Moldavia. I worked in Kishenev for only a few months before the Control and Revision Department checked with my organization and told the director to "fire the kike." I was fired. But I was very happy to return to Kiev. I was not the only Jew who had such an experience. None of the other graduating Jews from our university were sent to a good place of work, either.

In Kiev I was once again reminded that I was a Jew. Having graduated from a university, I still could not find a job. Only due to another Jew - the director of the "Nefteizmeritel" plant, was I hired to the Experimental and Design Bureau, where I worked until my retirement on pension.

My mother was sick for many years, and I was very attached to her, so I had no time or opportunity to think about marriage. For many years I remained single. My mother died in 1980. Finally, in 1986 I married.

My husband

My husband is the poet and writer Naum Meyerovich Shtilerman (Tikhiy). He was born on September 14, 1922, in the village of Emilchino, in the region of Zhitomir.

His father, Meyer Shtilerman, was a druggist. They lived in that Ukrainian village. Naum's mother, Raisa Shtilerman, did not work outside the home; she was a housewife, and raised her children, her son Naum and two daughters, Dina and Buzya.

In 1937, Naum's father was arrested, charged with being a German spy, and was sent to penal servitude. He was imprisoned in the Solovetsky Islands. He was a very ill man, practically blind. There he contracted tuberculosis. He returned home only after Stalin's death, and soon died, too.

Naum and his sisters had attended a Ukrainian school, but were placed in a Jewish class. It was not a class in which Yiddish or Hebrew was the language of tuition, but was simply a class into which all the Jewish children from the neighboring villages were collected. According to my husband, relations between the Jews and Ukrainians in their village were wonderful. Even though Yiddish was spoken at home, my husband also spoke fluent Ukrainian and considered the Ukrainian language to be his native tongue.

My husband is grateful to the Ukrainian people because when it became too late for his mother, Raisa Shtilerman, to be evacuated, and she had to remain in the occupied territories with her daughters Dina and Buzya during the war, they found shelter with Ukrainian families in Korostyshev. The people who rescued them were later awarded the title "Righteous Gentiles". Raisa Shtilerman died in 1990 in Israel, but her daughters Dina and Buzya are still living there.

Naum entered the University before the war, at the age of 15. He wanted to study in the Philology Department. He was a very gifted person. He passed all of his high school exams early and then aced his entrance exams. He was accepted even though his father was a member of a repressed minority. Perhaps he was accepted because he had gained entrance into the Ukrainian Department, which was "out of fashion" in those days - everyone wanted to study only the Russian language and literature.

Back in the university, Naum began to compose poems in Ukrainian. He brought his first collection of poems to a famous Ukrainian poet, who was also Jewish, Leonid Pervomaisky (Ilya Gurevich (1908-1973), a famous and popular Ukrainian Soviet writer. Pervomaisky is his pseudonym, which he had to take so that his works could be published in the USSR. He was born into a family of workers. His first publication appeared in 1924. He wrote in Russian and Ukrainian, poems and novels. He also translated from the German. During WWII he was a correspondent at the front.) He looked through it and said, "Everything is fine except your last name. Shtilerman should not be there. Translate it into Russian: "Shtil" means "quiet", so sign your name like this - Naum Tikhiy (Quiet)".

My husband could not print any of his poem collections before the war. After the war, he officially changed his last name, so that it is no longer his pseudonym - otherwise, his poems would have never been printed.

During the war, Naum was in the army, but since his father had been repressed, he was not allowed to fight in the battle, and after the war he could not join the Communist Party until his father was rehabilitated.

After the war Naum graduated from the Philology Department of the University, and devoted his life to poetry. Twenty-five of his poetic collections in Ukrainian have been printed. But all his life he felt anti-Semitism not on a common, but on an official, state level.

The first time he was not awarded the Shevchenko Prize was because he was not a Communist Party member, and he was not accepted into the Party because of his father. In order to sweeten the situation, he was instead awarded the Pavlo Tychyna Prize (another Ukrainian poet). In Tychyna's house, which is a museum, there is a portrait of my husband. He was always accepted there and his poems were read there. In general, people treated him kindly, understanding that he deserved much more than just Tychyna's Prize. Several times his books were presented for the State Prize, but every time another poet was found, who was more pleasing to the authorities. In 1995 his other collection of poems was published and again he was named for the Shevchenko Prize. But simultaneously, a book written by the wife of Drozd, the Secretary of the Writers' Union of Ukraine, was also named for the prize, and so she was the one who got it. But the next year, when the leadership of the State Prizes Committee changed, the poet Yavorivsky, who was its chairman, sent a letter to the publishers, who called us and invited my husband to nominate his book for the State Prize again. The book was nominated on September 23, 1996. The response of the Ukrainian poets was wonderful. The poet Nikolay Rudenko wrote on Naum's book, "Naum, this is what never dies". This happened on September 23, 1996. But on September 27, an article appeared in the "Literaturnaya Gazeta" newspaper claiming that Tikhiy is not a Ukrainian poet, but rather a Ukrainian-speaking poet, because he is just a Jew who speaks Ukrainian, so he cannot be awarded such a prize. My husband was so shocked by this article and took it so seriously that he died of a heart attack the next day.

My husband was a very talented man of two cultures. He would establish days when we were to speak only Yiddish with him so that he would learn that language well. When we were in Israel, at the Wailing Wall, at Yad-Vashem, he was very impressed, and that is where he wrote his poem "Conception" about Jewish women's fates in ghettos. But Ukraine and Ukrainian people were also very close and dear to him. He died too early, he was only 74. So, my happy family life was very short.

Among the members of our family, I am left alone. Mother's sisters Maria and Tatiana died in the early 80s; their children, my cousins, live abroad, in Israel and America. The closest people to me now are my husband's children from his first wife - his son Sergey and his daughter. Sergey is the director of a big newspaper in Kiev, and even though he is not Jewish according to his passport (his mother, Naum's first wife, was Ukrainian), he still identifies himself with the Jews, attends events in the Jewish community, and cooperates with leaders of Jewish organizations in Ukraine. My husband's children are grateful to me for becoming a true wife and friend of their father, who made the last years of his life sweeter. We have wonderful relations with them, even better than

children sometimes have with their own parents.

For my whole life I have honored the memory of my father, his brothers and all the Jews who died at the front or in Babi Yar. In 1945, I started going to Babi Yar on September 29, the anniversary of that terrible shooting of the Jews of Kiev. Since 1945, three Russian pilots have also been coming to Babi Yar every year on September 29. At the end of the war these pilots were kept in the Syretska concentration camp for prisoners of war, and they were made to eliminate the traces of Babi Yar. Prior to their retreating, the fascists wanted to eliminate all the traces, using their prisoners of war, who uncovered and burned corpses. So, these pilots were coming back for many years to honor the memory of innocent Jewish victims. Then only one came, then none.

In Babi Yar I met the famous writer Viktor Nekrasov, who also came there every year. To this place he brought his last flowers, red carnations, before he left the Soviet Union. He was exiled from the Soviet Union for his activities in defense of democracy, as this displeased the Soviet authorities. I was surprised that he did not even say "Hello" to me; he simply passed by me, put down his flowers, and left. He did not want to draw the attention of the Security Services officers to me, because they were watching him closely.

On September 29, 1961, on the 20th anniversary of the shooting, many young people came to Babi Yar not only from Kiev, but also from Moscow, Leningrad, and Tbilisi. Each of us carried a candle, and we placed a wreath in the form of a six-point star at the site. You can't imagine what happened there! All the participants were arrested, right then and there, on the sacred place where the shooting took place, they were put into police cars and taken away. It was a great shame. Nevertheless, I continued to go to that place every year. The Security Service told my employer that I attend anti-Soviet rallies, and I was summoned to the personnel department and was asked intimidating questions. But each year, I continued to go to Babi Yar, and all of my coworkers knew that.

A monument has been erected in Babi Yar, even two of them - a state monument and a Jewish menorah; a monument to children was erected there in 2001. The president, ambassadors, and high-profile activists in culture stage rallies and meetings there now, but very few of those who go there nowadays went there when it was forbidden.

I consider myself religious. Immediately after the war I began to attend synagogue again, first with my mother, and later with my husband. My husband and I contributed to the maintenance of the synagogue. Every time he was paid royalties, we gave part of them to the synagogue. That is why I even had my own place in the synagogue, and where there were lines for matzah, we got ours free of charge.

My present-day life

I read all the Jewish newspapers printed in Kiev, attend the Jewish "Khesed" and "Kinor" centers and the synagogue, when I can. Unfortunately, I don't know Hebrew. I have a Russian Bible, and when I come to the synagogue, I read from it.

My husband and I traveled to Israel several times: he was invited because he translated the poems of Israeli poets into Ukrainian. I sense my connection with Israel and could probably move there if it were not for old age and loneliness.

I celebrate all the Jewish holidays, Pesach, and especially Yom Kippur. I remember my first fast on September 29, 1941, very well - when we, evacuated Jews, were praying to God for the liberation of Kiev, our nation, and our country, and for our parents.

Jewish Ukrainians are now certainly more able to identify themselves as Jews, without hiding or being ashamed of their nationality. But I think that deep inside, anti-Semitism still exists in our Ukraine, only it is hiding for a time. And I would like the young Jews of Ukraine to return to their roots, to know their language, their history and religion, and I pray that they will never have to go through the horrors our generation had to endure. Thank you, that's all.