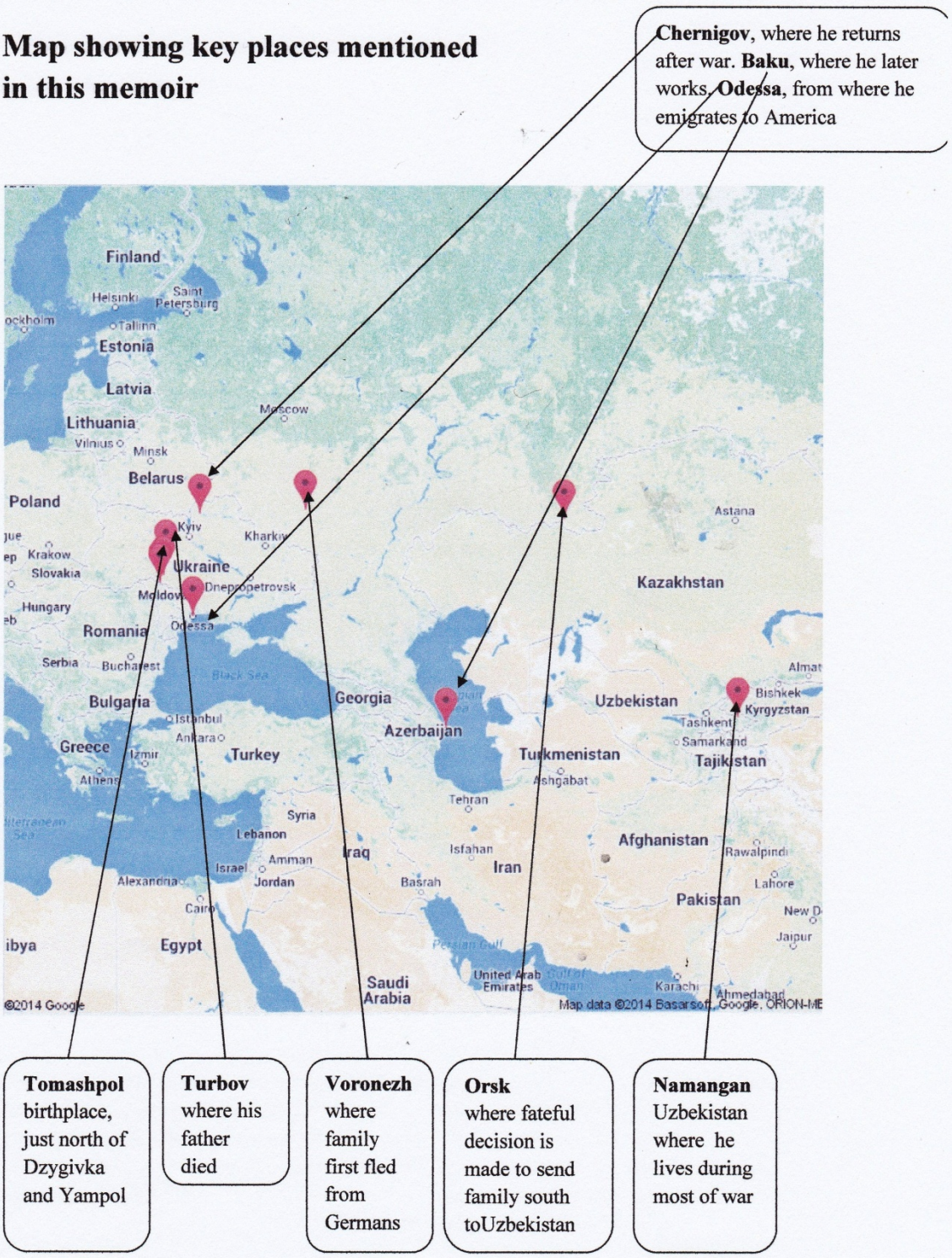
Fima's Story

Yefim Rozenberg, whom all know as Fima, is the grandson of Malkeh Maidenberg, eldest of the seven children of Solomon and Perel. His mother was Frida Balaban, his father was David Rozenberg. (Because Fima has choosen to spell his last name with a "z", this practice is followed. Others in the family go by "Rosenberg.")

Fima's detailed, heart-wrenching memoir provides a powerful insight into the lives of those in our family who did not emigrate to America or Canada, but who remained in Russia and the Soviet Union. They faced first the onslaught of the Nazi invasion, then the rebuilding of the country, then the privations (but also possibilities of the Soviet system.)

The memoir was written in Russian. It was translated into English in Odessa. Mike Maidenberg, second cousin of Fima, edited the first part of the memoir, and intends to edit the entire work. The facts have not been changed, only the wording and flow.

Map showing key places mentioned in this memoir



WHILE IT IS STILL IN MY MEMORY

A memoir by Yefim Rozenberg

[Translated from the Russian by Roza Rabzi, edited by Mike Maidenberg]

I have neither the eloquence nor the creative faculty to put the diverse facts of my life into a thrilling literary piece. But every life is a fascinating process, and every life has undeniably instructive episodes. These were prolific in my life. I want to record the crucial points while memory still tightly clings to days bygone. I don't want to be late in narrating what is still vivid in my mind.

Passing years seem to enhance the need, and more so when you have children, grandchildren, relatives and friends. They seem to be the ones to whom you can relate your life, if only through book pages. Perhaps they will find something to cherish there.

Letters and photos of the years past help conjuring up those gone forever. My parents, my wives, my friends, my pals. I see them all in my memory.

I recollect myself as a seven year old boy burdened with a satchel who firmly holds his mother's and father's hands, very proud being so "grown-up". A day to become a keepsake. Going to school for the first time. I remember being so inspired by what all boys are usually happy at. I remember suffering and shedding tears as everyone of my age does. Then came the years of growing up, maturing, and growing into an adult man.

I look back on my childhood and my life from today's perspective.

I regret that it never dawned upon me in my childhood, youth, and even adult years to get interested in the lives of my grandmothers and grandfathers, to inquire about their ancestors. It would have been of great interest and incredible value for me to have the written memoires of my great-grandfather whose service as a recruit in the army of the czar stretched for25 long years. Of no less value would have been the notes of my grandfather who, being a Pale of Settlement boy, cleared a life road for himself in the times of hardships for Jews. But when has it been easy for them?

And of absolute value would have been the records of my father who witnessed and participated in the most interesting and tragic events of the life in that country. But there are no records.

As I advance in years, the former lives of my ancestors, my parents in particular, start meaning more and more for me. But alas! There is nobody at hand to interrogate.

I am writing in hope that a day might come when my grandchildren take an interest in their roots, in order to better understand themselves.

For that matter I would like to leave this book with my records to them. I used to note down my memories wherever and whenever I found myself – in different parts of the world – but it was always an fulfilling thing.

Recollecting people close to my heart, places, and events is sort of living my life once more, though not only without them, but in a foreign land, friendless, jobless, bereft of regular occupations.

I have seen a lot, I have confronted various life phenomena, I have witnessed many events now slipping away into oblivion. I have something to say to my children, my grandchildren, and my nearest and dearest.

My life is about to come to its end. The time has come for final analysis.

I ask myself – isn't it too early? And my answer is – no, it is not too early. Just the time!

Today I see more clearly what has been done and what has not, what could have been done. Something was right, something was wrong. Something was judged unfairly, other things appeared unclear. Some people may have escaped my memory, and even being recollected might have appeared vague. Still I narrate my life the way I see it today. Thus I decided to publish these memories.

I am aware that my grandchildren whom I basically address in my mind, due to various reasons, mother-tongue problem included, may not understand in full what I have written. It was different epoch, a different life.

Yet I hope and believe that this book when found among the forgotten and negligible things will urge some of them to open it and read to the end, which will continue it.

WHOLE LIFE AHEAD

The year 1929. Major events of that year have become historic markers. This year started economic crisis in the United States known in as "The Great Depression". Herbert Hoover, a new president, was inaugurated. The world-renowned actress Audrey Hepburn was born.

Lev Trotsky was exiled from the Soviet Union. This historic period was marked by the onset of Joseph Stalin's autocracy and his cult of personality.

This year was also special due to the event of no significance for history, of no historic impact, absolutely unnoticeable for everyone – but of prime importance for the author of these lines.

On April 16, in the family of David E. Rosenberg and Frida (Balaban) Rosenberg , in a small Jewish settlement in Tomashpol, Ukraine I was born.

My parents got married a year before that, in 1928, my mother being only 16. To overcome the age difficulties a false birth certificate was received from the

bribed clerk, and she acquired a two years older age together with a new Rosenberg surname. I was born when she was 17.

According to my parents, we had not lived the whole year in that settlement when had to move. I have never been there since, having Tomashpol only in my legal papers as a place of birth.

My mother and father worked as bookkeepers in the sugar industry and had to move from one sugar plant to another in permanent pursuit of prosperity and "Jewish luck". And there were other reasons, which I relate later.

My memory keeps the names of those places: Kirnasovka, Sobolevka, Kapustyany, Stepanovka, and at last, Turbov.

Turbov was the place where my father died and where I and my mother were caught by the war which changed our lives forever.

My good memory backs me up in recollecting separate details and episodes of my life, starting from my seventh – eighth year.

Sugar plants used to be situated in countryside, near a village. The parents lived essentially a country life: they always had a kitchen garden with potatoes and other vegetables to be stored and preserved (salted cucumbers, sauerkraut, etc.) to be eaten in winter. Often they fattened up a hog and had a cow to milk. But still they remained educated urban people who despite their factory job spoke good Russian, not Ukrainian.

Many of the factory white collar workers could manage a domestic aide. It was a regular thing, not to be condemned. Our family had such an aide. She was an elderly and very kind Ukrainian woman from a neighboring village. She was like a family member.

Leaving for school once, my chance look back caught her crossing me. "There is no God", I said laughingly to her. She answered. "He is in the heavens, and all your future is in His hands". I looked up. My childish fantasy depicted Him sitting in the heavens with a halo around His head. He winked at me and opening a thick book said: "Your whole fate is here – the fate of Efim Rosenberg – and you cannot escape it". I gave a laugh and skipped along to school.

Often at life's crossroads I had that vision again, but there were no grounds for laughter then.

I was a student at a regular Ukrainian village school and spoke exceptionally good Ukrainian when not at home.

It escapes me how people everywhere come to know their national affiliation. I seem to have come across that issue early. The realization dawned upon me in a special manner. First, it came from relations with my age children and with adults of different nationalities, Russians and Ukrainians. They hinted that it was not very decent to be a Jew, and I even had to even feel ashamed.

Frankly speaking, it was a puzzle for quite a time. I did not pay much attention to it, though I was pained by this fact pressed onto me by the environment.

The feeling of this injustice accompanied me almost through my whole life. It started when times were hard. We are not free to choose the birth dates and epochs. We are not free to choose our parents and, as a consequence, the social circle to start our lives.

My early childhood is stored in my memory as a time of complete lack; food and clothing were scarce. And absence of money was not the sole reason. Even with it you could buy nothing: the shops were empty. Buying an overcoat or a suit was of life significance. Those were infrequently, once in 6-8 years. As time went by it was sewn inside out for further wear "like new".

Summers were spent bare-footed, in a country-boy manner. To have shoes meant to be "a bourgeois" and it was even derided. I went with the crowd: climbing trees, engaging in rowdy behavior, scuffling with opponents.

In 1940 fate violently struck me for the first time: on March 23 my father – David Rosenberg – died of tuberculosis, then a widely spread disease.

What can I recollect of my father's life and the whole family life climate when he was still alive? What can I sense today of the boy I was then?
I remember happiness from being close to my father. He spent much of his attention and time on me. We roamed the countryside together, hunted for mushrooms and berries in the woods. We used to go biking. Father had a fowling-piece and sometimes he took me along for a duck hunt. He was a devoted photographer; all my childhood shots were his doing. He instructed me in a great many things, including the ability of observing and comprehending.

We had an old gramophone which was succeeded by a record player. Few now remember those devices. We used to listen to vinyl disc records. Father liked popular music. He played the violin and mandolin.

I am amazed my memory has preserved both words and tunes of the songs my mother used to sing in Ukrainian while putting me to bed. I remember the melodies and words of many songs my father sang.

My father and mother were a hospitable and friendly family. We were often visited. My father was a good social mixer. He was a decent honest man who never tried to benefit from different situations that many would use at times to adapt themselves to complicated and contradictory life at large, especially at the crucial points which were the days of my parents' youths.

My father was born into a large family of Efrem Rosenberg in 1900. Unfortunately, his birthplace is unknown. Merciless time has carried all relatives of his generation off, but basic milestones of his life haven't escaped me.

In 1917 Russia underwent a socialist revolution. The czar was dethroned, his government overthrown, and the Communists took power.

By that time my father with his parents had settled in Bessarabia (Moldavia). When and why his family went there, in which village, settlement, or township they lived – is still a question.

Before the revolution Jews in czarist Russia were deprived of civil rights and oppressed. They lived in a special zone called the Pale of Settlement. Jewish pogroms and abusive actions were characteristic of that time.

Equality and liberty pledged by the Communists resulted in active participation of Jews in the revolution and succeeding civil war. My father was among those who anticipated new rule. At eighteen he joined the revolutionary Red Army as a volunteer and was involved in the battles against the adherents of the czarist regime.

In a melee he got wounded by an enemy's bayonet, his hand was torn and twisted. Three fingers of his left arm were immovable the rest of life. With that wound he was taken to a military hospital. There he got involved in a seemingly negligible incident which nevertheless impacted my father's fate.

Once that hospital where my father was undergoing treatment was visited by a founding father of Soviet power – Leon Trotsky, Lenin's fellow campaigner. He was a Minister for Military Affairs then. Trotsky was the supreme commander-in-chief and was in charge of the army and all its activities in the civil war.

On these occasions he often handed military awards and gifts to the wounded. In that way, while inspecting the hospital where my father was undergoing treatment he got to know that due to his crippled hand father could not make the "roll-your-own" cigarette, so Leon Trotsky presented him a smoking pipe etched with his personal signature. It was the ultimate claim to fame for my father until a certain time.

But the world changes. A bitter fight started between Josef Stalin who had gained the pinnacle of power and Leon Trotsky who also was longing for it; finally Trotsky was exiled and killed (by Stalin's order) in Mexico.

Thus that essentially insignificant single fleeting encounter with Trotsky, together with the material evidence of the fact could cost human life. The fear that the story of the pipe might become known to anyone outside the family was ever present. In the murderous year of 1937 many people known to have only a very distant relation to Trotsky were condemned and shot.

My mother took care of the Trotsky pipe along with father's awards and his civil war records. Then all was lost in 1941 and the war.

After father's wounding the family lived in Ukraine. He worked as an accountant. He let his career languish. He was perhaps unambitious. Perhaps he never sought promotion and special benefits in some dishonest way.

My final encounter with him was before his death. It was winter of 1940 in Odessa. He was taken to hospital and the doctors then could not help him.

Antibiotics and other effective medicine capable of getting over tuberculosis were not available yet.

I remember our parting. Father was standing in the hospital hall beside me and was unable to stanch his tears. He felt what was ahead of him, that we were parting forever.

With his last breath he called, "Frida, Fima" – my mother's name and mine.

My father was buried in Odessa's international cemetery.

CHILDHOOD CUT SHORT BY WAR

Childhood gives a push to everything in one's life. It is always with us, and each person has one. The generation of boys in the former USSR to which I belonged was doomed to live it under war. And God forbid our grandchildren from living through both my and those boys' experiences. Only few of them have survived until to-day.

Still fewer are those who have confronted the war face to face, who remember vividly true realities of those years.

War has many facets. A lot of books on war, numerous films, documents, evidences, stories, artistic presentations, photos, various forms of its depiction, sometimes contradictory, sometimes untrustworthy, or purposely sham, sometimes unintentionally distorted, sometimes skillfully fabricated – of all sorts and varied inconsistencies. It seems I know a lot about it. I have read a lot.

But all the same, having perused heaps of books on the war published in different years, rarely had I come across the plots setting out in details one of its most complicated, constituents – evacuation of innumerable people forced to change dramatically, in no time, their everyday lives, their jobs, their lifestyles, and even ages – having matured or become senile during the process.

Both fiction and nonfiction lack a comprehensive description of huge human masses moving eastward from the west, of their lives, severities of their escape routes, hardships, and loss of their loved ones, peculiarities of their sojourn in a foreign land, and their relations with native residents.

The gigantic scale of wartime evacuation, its earliest several months in particular, was new for the world. According to official statistics, several million people were organized to be evacuated by railroad only from the country's west to its east, north, and south-east. The figure is astonishing as it is, but about the same number of people should not be forgotten who were moved in the reverse direction to participate in the battles. And those who were destined to escape the battlefields started their own ordeal in the initial weeks and months of the War.

I feel myself a tiny grain of sand in that human ocean. But I can have a say in discussing those days.

I shall recount what I experienced in the years that were etched forever into my life and the lives of the generation of youth born in the late twenties. They were under draft age in 1941-1945 which contributed to their survival.

I wish the memory of the horrible tragedy experienced by our people in the twentieth century to be passed on to the following generations. You can forget the good. But never this sort of thing.

AN ESCAPE TO NOWHERE

My father's death forced my mother to look for a way out of situation. In a year she decided to move to her parents – Elya and Molka Balaban - who lived in the town of Yampol located in the immediate vicinity of the border between Soviet Union and Romania.

Just two weeks prior to the war all our household belongings (furniture, clothes, etc.) were sent to Yampol. We were left with absolute necessities only as we intended to travel to Yampol by train in the nearest future.

But our plans were not destined to come true.

On June 22, 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union by surprise. I was twelve then.

I had just finished my fifth school year, and as I can remember now, was rather a smart and educated boy. I used to read avidly, and made attempts to understand the political atmosphere of those years.

These were the initial days of the war, but the German army already occupied an enormous territory. In about two weeks since the war began their army was close to our settlement.

Boys as we were then, we were intrigued. We could not realize what was going on. For us it was a grand adult game. At our school the so-called "eradicative squads" were organized to resist the German subversive activists. All of us "brave soldiers" were "armed" with a single small-bore sport rifle without cartridges; each one however was given a gas-mask. Our proud patrol headed by a school military instructor protected the wells (no other water supply in the settlement) from being poisoned by "the spies".

The sky overhead was full of German aircraft. They flew to bomb Minsk, Kiev, and Moscow. The German pilots felt themselves masters of the skies. Soviet airplanes tried to resist them, though more often they were shot down and burnt while falling.

I watched one German airplane, however, being shot down. Two pilots were lucky enough to escape by a parachute jump into the nearest forest. The whole settlement, armed with whatever they could, hurried into the forest in search of them.

The pilots were found sitting at a brook engrossed in animated intercourse. They were not afraid of us. Captives as they were, they none the less presented some force backing them. And driven by sheer curiosity we tried to talk to those pilots until militia officers came and took them.

No sooner had we crossed our window panes with paper strips to protect ourselves from possible sharp fragments of glass than the word was spread by our local authorities that all wishing to be evacuated could start. And surely they turned up: these were the families both of the Communist Party local leaders and Soviet officials equated to them, leaving aside overwhelming number of Jews.

It was the Jews who were in the majority of people evacuated eastward.

On July 3, 1941 the Germans were right up to our neighborhood; our settlement has escaped bombardment only due to its plants that were of no interest. That was the day of our evacuation to the place designated for us by the sugar plant officials.

Another reason for remembering the date was the fact that since the beginning of the war it was the day of Stalin's first public speaking. We heard him hypocritically addressing the nation, "Dear brothers and sisters", and could not even imagine that after many long years that "leader's" true impact on the fates of people in our country would be disclosed.

But those days that kind of address has inspired even greater surge of love for him. People wept listening to the speech and elevated Stalin to nearly God's level; they felt sorry for him and inwardly vowed eternal love and allegiance. And his concluding words, "Enemy will be defeated. Victory will be ours!" gave people confidence despite the dire straits the country was in.

Victory is just ahead and it is inevitable – the idea seemed obsessively evident for everyone who heard the speech. And victory did come, but not as soon, and owing to unimaginable human sacrifice.

We never gave a thought then to a way the evacuation was organized; who was in charge, and when everything had been scheduled. Looking back into the past I feel amazed and stunned today: the war started quite of a sudden, with German troops invading huge territories in a flash, causing panic and confusion. And that was a country with population who believed devotedly that if a war started, "…the enemy will fall onto his own land under the mighty bloodless blow…" (words of the popular patriotic song of those days).

But small railroad station Turbov, none the less, had "echelons" standing ready to meet us. These consisted of regular freight cars having two square openings in the upper corners and a broad sliding door in the middle for loading and unloading. The interior was filled with two-tiered plank beds.

My mother and I reached the station on foot with a single small valise. I have mentioned already that almost all our belongings had been sent to her parents

just before the war began. Who could have guessed in that country, leaving aside our Turbov, that the war would not start at some other place but at the very threshold of our home?

Those who used to read newspapers, and they were read by all adult people, could have bet on friendship with Germany to be strong and durable. It simply could not be other way for it was written in the newspapers. And no way otherwise! The newspapers were supposed to be always the supreme truth.

And even if our things had made it to Turbov they would have been lost anyway. We could not manage more than we had taken with us. My mother surely could not anticipate what was to come, unaware what evacuation entailed. She carefully locked the apartment and put the key into her bag. It looks both naïve and sorrowful today.

As soon as the news about evacuation spread across the sugar plant neighborhood our houses and household buildings, as well as administrative and outbuildings and shops, all were surrounded by peasants on carts. Even though watched by passers-by they burst open the doors to loot. No one was going to hinder them. It looked a trivial routine without incidents. A complete anarchy in the settlement. And those from the ruling body, if there still remained the ones, were busy preparing evacuation of their own.

Another interesting moment: the sugar plant with its whole equipment was ready to be evacuated. Wasn't it striking? It was July 3, 1941; only 10 days after the war had burst out. Front line was stretching just along our settlement.
But the non-strategic plant's equipment, however, was organized to be removed to the eastern regions of the country. Hence, the authorities must have envisaged that option too.

Sugar is produced from beets. Thus the plant personnel with families were destined to the state agricultural enterprise in Voronezh region.

I remember going alongside my mother to the station. I had a school bag in my hand, and a real gas mask was hanging over my shoulder – "ammunition" for personal safety!

People occupied the freight cars. The train started eastward, to a future unknown to its passengers.

A new period of my life had begun. Neither I, nor my mother ever came back to Turbov. Ahead were four years of wartime life, life in a foreign land, years of starving, need, fear, hardships, sufferings, and years of my rapid growing up.

ECHELON

The train was moving slowly. You didn't know when and where it may stop, or start anew. It was all unpredictable.

Those eastbound trains were wild. Railway crossing points were our most often stops. Pending the troop-trains coming from the opposite direction sometimes it took several hours to start moving again. They passed us with their open platforms set with Soviet tanks bearing white-paint mottos: “Forward to victory!” “For the Motherland!” “For Stalin!” We were especially inspired by a “To Berlin!” one. It bore some hope in itself. The refugees cried encouragingly from their freight cars, “Hurrah!” “Beat the enemies!” “Come back victorious!”

And it was a natural impulse of common people in uncommon circumstances. It was not inspired by propaganda. There was no hostility to Soviet power. People were obsessed with love to Stalin and hope for a forthcoming victory and return to a peaceful life – all that inseparable from his name. These were sincere feelings.

There was mutual support on the way. Hot meals were awaiting us at the large stations while we were forging ahead to the east. Food was brought to the very car doors. Local residents used to gather toward the time of the refugee echelons arrival… They eyed us with pity and surprise: “How come – war refugees?”

We received bread, baby food. Sanitary conditions left much to be desired of course but our belief that all that was not for long: the enemy will be defeated very soon as Stalin had promised – backed us up against all hardships of that extraordinary trip.

I remember our echelon consisting of freight cars for the most part and several passenger ones. And common people felt exasperation towards the families of Soviet and Communist party officials of high standing that had advantages even in those conditions going in the passenger cars and alleged to have all their possessions with them, this being the reason why many people were left behind due to the lack of place.

I would like to stress that it was behavior, the situation itself that caused indignation; the reason itself was not related to the Soviet power. We had a simple explanation – “Stalin could not know about all the mess. When in the know – punishment is due”. Those years were special for quite naturally blaming “people’s enemies” of subversive activity causing diverse violations in all spheres of life. My present substantial knowledge of those “people’s enemies”, their fates, and their huge count in particular, makes me indignant with the unfair practices of their “treatment”.

At one station a rumor was spread that a car with the captured German women pilots was added to our echelon. We ran for it. Windows were barred, and two armed soldiers were on guard. We saw women’s faces behind the grating.

Indignant mob started crying, “assassins”, “fascist bastards”, “damn you”. We, the boys, tried to hit the car windows with stones. By that time we already knew about our cities and towns bombarded by German aviation, thus our hatred to German women pilots was natural.

The guards at last pacified the crowd: “Hey, guys, these are no Germans. They are wives of “people’s enemies”. We take them to Siberia”. At one instant we all noticed the tear-stained eyes of the imprisoned women behind the grates. I remember how the assembled people became silenced at once and without uttering a word went back to their cars. What could have been their thoughts at that moment!

Our echelon was heading slowly for the east. Several weeks passed and we got accustomed to echelon life. Those who have never experienced it can’t even imagine to-day what it was. As the saying goes, “God forbid survive what you can get used to”.

The cars were “populated” with women of different ages, children, and elders. All men eligible for military service were quickly and orderly enlisted during the initial two or three days of the war.

Conscription was organized as follows. All Soviet enterprises, institutions, offices, and agricultural units used to have special secret plan “in case of war”. Following the instruction from “above” it was cut open on June 22, 1941 by the corresponding top managers and put into practice: all draft-aged men of eighteen and up were gathered at the induction centers – at schools, clubs, cinema theaters, and other pre-specified places. Thereafter all conscripts were placed into the freight cars of troop-trains waiting ready for them to be taken to their destinies. Onsite arming and fitting out with uniforms were essentially out of question of course. Thus the heavily armed German Panzer divisions preceding their attacking army were amused by almost negligible resistance.

Some modern films about those days featuring conscripts sent off to army with music; mass meetings with farewell speeches and “beat the enemy” appeals; parting with loved ones; faith vows, and such other script fantasies cause my ironic curiosity. This theme is almost foreign to documentary films.

I remember how it looked like in Turbov. In the first days of the war the troop trains were formed at its railway station to entrain the selectees from the neighboring settlements. We, the boys, surely were hanging about gazing at what was going on. And what we saw was tearful. The platform and rails were packed with women clinging to “their own” men – husbands, brothers, and sons. Few militiamen and officers tore them off by force. It was as if everyone understood that those “the very first” would perish or be captured by the Germans in their first battle. And what battle it could have been? Better say massacre.

It was neither cry, nor moan, or weeping that made the air dense – it was the savage women's wail. And when the conscripts at last were entrained and those who saw them off pushed aside the train started moving. Crowds of maddened women rushed in its pursuit. Still wailing, they followed the train, stumbling and falling, until it passed out of sight

Every troop train taking the selectees to the battlefields was seen off in the same way. You'll never see a film featuring such a harrowing parting of the living with the living ones. But is it apt for a film? That horror can be kept only in one's memory after going through it. It will stay there forever, and will go with you.

While approaching our destination the inhabitants of the echelon were quite peaceful towards one another recognizing transiency of their mutual existence, and endured conditions of freight car life. Women who constituted the majority of refugees almost never quarreled though all of them suffered from the absence of elementary sanitary conditions. And though it was summer and very hot sultry weather situation in the car was rather bearable.

The shops close to the stations still had some food left. The farmers used to bring vegetables and fruits to the echelons. Many of us had made provisions for a journey. Money was still valued, and as distribution system was not introduced yet. At railway junctions with crossing lines where huge transport convoys were formed sometimes several echelons were accumulated hosting refugees from different western regions of the country.

At one of the stations once my mother has found an echelon from the place where her parents lived. The hope to find them in that echelon was next to nothing. But she went seeking. And in one of the cars she found people from Yampol who told her that her parents refused to be evacuated. They remained at their place. They must have thought – as many did those days – that Germans were a cultured civilized nation. Nothing else was reported Soviet propaganda in the years of Soviet-German friendship.

Nobody could know anything about atrocities, taunts, about "the final solution of the Jewish question" being one of fascism's purposes. Nobody knew and could imagine anything like that either. My grandfather and grandmother were not exceptions, and they decided not to move into the unknown.

Those who had witnessed their last days told us about it much later. My ancestors' life end was tragic. On a summer day of 1941 my grandmother Molka was beaten to death with a rifle butt, and my grandfather was imprisoned in a concentration camp where he perished later on.

Yet of all that – I shall repeat – we were unaware: those were the initial weeks of the war.

THE VORONEZH PAUSE

After several weeks of moving at the same speed and in the same direction as the retreating Red Army we arrived in Voronezh from where we were sent to a state agricultural enterprise in Mikhailovka village.

We were temporarily placed in the cinema theater situated in a small park. Our "community" comprising several dozens of families had to stay there a few days. Local officials were prompt in providing us with a roof and heat.

As soon as we were settled I rushed into the street. I could not wait to see where we found ourselves. Here I need to stress that a lot of children had arrived. But I appeared to be the oldest – the others were much younger.

I can't help but tell here in detail what happened there. How come that just in that Russian out-of-the-way place I personally, not through hearsay, came face to face with a horrible phenomenon. Anti-Semitism! Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not spared me and influencing my fate.

Mikhailovka was the first place for me to encounter and remember for my whole future life that disgusting human derangement.

In the park I was stopped by a group of 14-15 years old teenagers. Aware that we were the refugees from Ukraine they asked if we had Jews among us. Unafraid, with nothing to hide, anticipating no trick in the question, not in the least ashamed I answered readily, "Surely we have, I am a Jew myself". And right away a punch in the face followed, then another one, and more. I was lucky to have an adult appear for a moment in the street which caused the boys to disappear. But since that day I became a target for the fists of all the local boys, whether they were older or younger than me. Meeting me in the street they strived to beat me crying "Beat the Jew!"

Surprisingly, I was ashamed. It appeared I was to blame! It appeared I must be beaten and despised!

That feeling was a painful endurance for I tried to understand what it was all about. I spared even my mother from recognizing the fact. I felt shy. I appeared to be unlike others! I could understand nothing – and still can't.

I still do not grasp the reasons for today's anti-Semitic ideology. I am aware of them but do not understand. We, the Jews, accept it as an established disaster that exists beyond our conscience. But why?

In the interior of Russia, not even in a city but in rural province, in that entire neighborhood one would not find if only a single Jew! For those boys I must have been the first Jew in their lives they have met. But hatred to Jews was alive in them as alive are the invisible microbes in human bodies.

Like a living genetic material, anti-Semitism must have been introduced into those lads with maternal blood and milk, being for them a natural state of human existence. And how else could it have sprung there? Who else, but the parents and

adult entourage could have installed such a hostile attitude to Jews in those village guys? Its roots can be traced back into the far-off centuries. It has survived until present day.

Coming of age, the former children make it a generally accepted rule. Moreover, this rule becomes sometimes an adopted part of state policy.
After that first encounter with anti-Semitism so many decades have passed – and I am still unable to imagine any other explanation for its persistence.

The long and short of it is we had to live in the environment we found ourselves in. We were given a small room in the community. We acquired some household utensils and crockery.

Little by little refugees settled down to work – whichever they could find. My mother was accepted to the local managing office as an accountant.
But until then we joined all able-bodied local residents in the fields. It was harvest time. We mowed down the wheat and the rye, threshed it, took to the barns. I too had to learn all that.

Thus at twelve, in the first year of the war I started working. After the simple "womanish" work of binding the cut cereals into bundles I was entrusted with combine harvester. It was in tow of a tractor those days and easy to control.
After that I was ranked higher to the accounting clerk with a pretty decent salary. I used to make the round of the fields mounted on a saddle-horse assigned to me as a sort of personal and service transport.

My age never hindered me in that work. The war was on, manpower was limited. I appeared rather competent for that job and worked conscientiously.
I remember how often we, the refugees, were amazed by the local residents' attitude towards their work. They worked reluctantly and tried to get a nap just in the height of the harvesting; organized prolonged breaks.

The refugee women tried to make them understand that they should work faster and more conscientiously – for it was bread they harvested! Both people and the front needed it.

Smiles were the answer. They joked, "It is war all the same, and the Germans will come soon".

I have heard a retort from a girl once, "Get bouquets ready – German bride-grooms are coming". And strong young country girls smiled gaily and joked trivially about it, confusing naively war with fun.

Here I can't help telling about an episode in 1945, just at the end of the war, which is still stuck in my memory. We were returning to Ukraine from evacuation. In the waiting-room of some station a group of young, strong, well-fed women was standing. They were nicely clad, with make-up and fine modern hairdos. High-quality leather suitcases stood behind them.

Our worn out mothers, looking older their real ages after four terrible years in a foreign land were gazing at those Russian in their appearance women in surprise. They turned out to be German captives who were on their way back from Germany where they worked as house-maids, cooks, nurses, and fulfilled other unskilled work.

I will not give comments to the episode I have witnessed myself. I know what foreign land, slave labor, in war-time particularly are; I simply narrate what I have seen with my own eyes. I guess those women used to work at some "good" households (those surely must have been), and in passing have picked up "trophies" from the plundered Germany.

I always was a devoted reader; I couldn't imagine life without books. I spent my leisure time going to Voronezh from Mikhailovka to a library. I read books, magazines, sometimes went to the cinema. The closeness of the front line was not felt in rural areas, but in Voronezh itself tension was growing.

Like a rising tide, the signs of the approaching front were scattering over the city streets. Military men from different kinds of troops and of different military ranks have noticeably grown in number. Anti-aircraft artillery and special "sound-locators" were installed. That device used in wartime looked like several pipe-sockets to reinforce the capacity of human ear: you could hear the boom of the advancing enemy planes and sound the air alert.

Moreover, the city perimeter was guarded by numerous barrage balloons connected by metal gauze raised as high as several meters above the earth and intended to protect from the low altitude bombers that aimed at vital municipal and industrial objects.

Those days Voronezh was one of the largest and perhaps the major aircraft construction city in the country.

The city was getting ready for defense. The able-bodied population built trenches and anti-tank barriers, squads of elders and women "volunteers" were organized to help army. And soon the bombing got under way.

Watching the rapid approach of the front people felt the city was doomed. Amidst us, the refugees (Jews for the most part), who lived in the immediate vicinity of Voronezh panic started to aggravate slowly. "What shall we do?" We had among us several elderly or unfit to be enlisted men. It was they who discussed what should be done, and took the initiative. Some said, "onwards and as far as possible!" It was they who called, "we must keep moving!" Eternal Russian questions: what to do? What to start from? And the like Jewish questions: to go, not to go, where to go, what for, and how to go? But still – to go!

I can't help mentioning, as a joke, that the same appeal was heard several decades later when thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union, and after its collapse

– from its former constituent republics - have started out, but this time they were heading for Israel, America, Australia.

What is the most paradoxical – many went to that same Germany from which had fled in horror in 1941. And in this way the circle I found myself in is now closed.

The “keep moving” appeal has been recurrent since the historical exodus from Egypt, and there are periods when it makes the restless, often oppressed, humiliated, and persecuted Jewry move into the unknown. As far as possible from calamity as they imagine. But is there a place without it?

I wonder if (God forbid) “something” will take place in America – where will its Jews go? Returning back to Russia can’t be excluded, the same way as China is not out of question. Inscrutable are the ways of God our Lord!

The little leadership group acted promptly: about the same people in a body gathered their belongings and left Voronezh for the east. Our exit was legally sanctioned.

Now we were moving to the “Volga Region Germans Autonomous Republic" existing those days, to its Gryazi station, to be “settled temporarily”. As became known later, ethnic Germans were deported from there in 1941. Stamped “hostile-minded anti-Soviet nation”, they were taken to the Siberian and concentration camps.

We were leaving Voronezh land where we had paused to gain breath. Recollecting that time today I cannot but express my gratitude to it. People expecting the echelons were gathered at the station. They were abundant. All waited for the echelons to be made up.

The station waiting-rooms could not host all of us, so the railroad station neighborhood was packed with refugees. My mother and I managed to squeeze ourselves into that human mass which occupied the floors in the station building. We spent several fearful days and nights there.

By that time Voronezh already was within the front action zone. It was bombarded every night. If it were cloudy days the raids were continued, the sky staying free from planes only on sunny days. The German command was methodical and careful. They never used aviation on clear days fearing great loss of aircraft and pilots due to good visibility and intense anti-aircraft artillery defense of the city. Soviet aircraft in the skies over the city were as if absent. I have never seen dog-fights there. The barrage balloons hovering around the city were put down in the morning.

It was only on cloudless days that mother could make her way through the city to get some provision. The suitcase with foods packed to sustain us in our travel was stolen at the railway station in the first days of our staying there.

The most awful were the night bombardments: the city was muffled in darkness (for the sake of camouflage), and the bomb shelter could not handle the multitude of people from the railway station. The city defense ceased resisting, and the end was at hand. We were sitting amidst darkness listening to the roar of the bursting bombs and waiting for our death to come.

We were lucky, however: one of the days of hopeless waiting was crowned with an incoming echelon. We were allotted a freight car with plank-beds which we made cram-full.

A steam-engine was attached and we were taken away from war. As far as possible from bombing, from permanent fear of missing time to leave, of being involved into that massacre, of horror and death waiting for us all. We got out of a hell, we were lucky! We did not worry about the future, we were not scared by inconveniences and the unknown. We were alive – and only this matters.

ON THE WAY TO SIBERIA

Leaving Voronezh our train was bombarded. It pulled up short, shouts and shooting were heard. Panic-stricken people rushed out of the cars and scattered across the fields. Two or three German planes were soaring over firing from machine-guns. It lasted less than few minutes.

It is beyond my powers to convey a feeling of death nearing you, your seeming state of being killed. Some people were killed just beside me. My mother, her eyes widened frantically, was hauling me somewhere with her arm. In her other arm she was dragging a suitcase. Recollecting that senseless rescue of the suitcase some time later we made jokes and laughed .

Those dreadful minutes have etched the smell of death into my memory forever. My life was rather rich in evidencing different death patterns rather closely. Memory does go blunt at times losing its physical poignancy. But when a human being is perishing besides you with his body torn asunder into a bleeding formless mass, and the like – you'll never forget it.

In a little while after the bombing people regained consciousness. We were fortunate to have only few victims. There was a hospital-car in our echelon, and the wounded were given help. Others occupied their places. The train started. Our car, our "wheeled home" attached to others like it, held about 50 people.

A metal stove occupied its center. Summer was almost gone, autumn was coming. The stove was akin to a pre-war comfort and at the same time it was related somehow to life of the Stone Age cave-dwellers – the fortunate holders of fire. Leaving aside that life-saving metal stove, people themselves, and their squalid belongings there was nothing else in the car. Neither blankets, nor sheets, or pillows. All of us were clad rather lightly, without winter wear.

Everyday trivialities of human life turned out quite a conundrum. No wash-stands – well, one can survive without being washed. But how you can pass without lavatories?

The train was sure to stop at stations, junctions, flag stations. People rushed from the rather high-floor cars having no steps or ladders. There was mutual help in trying to land safely and get back. As trousers were not women's wear those days one wouldn't call the sight aesthetic.

People "squatted down" under the cars, beside the cars, amid the cars – where one could find a place, men next to women. No shame! You had to hurry. The train could start any moment. Those especially modest who went far under the cars ran risks. A woman under the neighboring car was run over by a starting train. I remember wildly, hysterically hauling people who have seen that.
Considering that both eastward and westward lots of echelons without lavatories were travelling their traces at railway stations looked like a dense carpet of human waste.

When an echelon was stopped at the remote side tracks of significant stations it was an ordeal to make one's way across those "minefields" (as the foul railroad neighborhood was called).

But it was a vital necessity to make that way, basically to find water. We had no buckets. People streaming to some single water distributing faucet fell to blows with each other for getting a place to fill their kettle, bottle, or can.

Lice were the eternal companions of this human clot. Overcrowding, tight nearness of sleeping without underwear change favored their phenomenal multiplying. The chance to be saved of them was null. They tortured immensely, especially kids were harmed.

At significant stations, however, in order to avert danger of disastrous epidemic outbreaks all underwent the so-called "sanitizing". The echelon was taken to a side-track. Its inhabitants were herded in the sanitary inspection premises consisting of three rooms: cloakroom, bathroom, and clothing room. Those to be treated (men and women in turns) in groups of 45 persons heaped their clothes on the cloakroom floor – all together: overcoat, underwear, stockings, socks, underpants, shorts – and entered a bathroom where a wash lasted twenty five – thirty minutes. During this time their clothes were loaded into the metal washtubs and driven off for treatment with high-temperature steam. When we entered the clothing room after bathing we stumbled on a heap of the "well-done", damp, and reeking clothes.

Just imagine a scene of 1941 autumn: several dozens of naked women pawing through that heap in search of their clothes – isn't it a subject for the outstanding war painting or photograph!

And another quite simple everyday problem. The cars were not lit. Neither lamps, nor lanterns, or candles – and besides, where should they have come from? In the daytime it was at least a little lighter. Two tiny windows and half-open door could not let the sufficient light in. The car was shaded. But this was rather bearable yet. The eyes got accustomed and light deficiency could be tolerated. But with the onset of night we had to stay in complete darkness until morning. What we were doing? Simply were laying on our plank-beds tightly pressed against each other and blindly touching the lice. It is quite possible when the lice make dwelling nests in your clothes. Women were talking, talking, talking, or squabbled.

We were happy with only one achievement of mankind present in our wheeled "home". Due to our stove we did not feel cold. We could get warm, boil a kettle, or even cook a pot of frozen potatoes.

The stove fire was on all the time. For that purpose we used to steal coal from containers on the station tracks meant for the locomotive fire-boxes. It was a dangerous thing. The coal used to be guarded by the armed sentry.

I don't remember exactly, but judging from the dates of Voronezh campaign we had left it in the late August 1941, and information about the Germans defeat near Moscow caught us somewhere on the way in western Siberia where weather was terribly cold then.

Of special concern on our endless (as we thought) way to the unknown destination was worry about our daily bread.

As scarce foods drawn from Mikhailovka came to their end (I have mentioned elsewhere that our suitcase with food was stolen), and our small money got devalued, we found ourselves starving. You could buy nothing at the stations even if you had some money – the shop shelves were empty. At the station farmer markets and at the car doors whereto the local market women came running, the most vital foods – bread, cereals, and vegetables – were priced beyond one's imagination.

The so-called "natural barter" became very popular soon. Food was changed for things – garments, valuables, gold and silver trappings. The major barter products were bread and potatoes. A bucket of potatoes could have been exchanged for a gold ring. What else was left to be done?

Am I to move the reader to pity with my memories of crying hungry children, of women's legs swollen from hunger, of elders' hungry faints? I don't think so. Those who never knew what real hunger was are unlikely to understand. But with all that we, the refugees, at union stations were still given help within powers of local residents. How else we could have survived? Foodstuffs distribution offices were organized where we could, overcoming great difficulties (lack of information, endless queues, muddle, submitting legal papers on every occasion, etc.), receive bread and other foods to sustain us against starving.

To receive that "payok" or ration a passport had to be presented to which a special note was inscribed to avoid duplication. Its major product still was potatoes. Ration, water, fuel, and lavatory problems had in their trail other negative effects. Primarily it was risk to miss the train. Examples were abundant when people in their search of food, water, or lavatory could not find their echelon after returning back. Considering total lack of any information on the echelon destination or its route, it caused months-long ordeal, attempts to find those of kin, and to human tragedies sometimes.

I am unable to recollect exactly today but our forced journey took many weeks, no less than two or two and a half months anyway. Sometimes train departed soon after arrival, but now and then it could stay detained for several days. Train schedule was related to many reasons beyond our competence, the overladen single track of the Trans-Siberia Railroad leading from west to east included. At every short or long railway span the trains had to stop waiting for the approaching ones. These stops took hours. Westward directed troop trains had undeniable advantage of course.

With all those adversities, however, we were disturbed by lack of information. We knew nothing about the fates of our kin, about the front, or our country, or the world developments. Scarce information could be got from a chance three-four-days-old newspaper, from radio at some station, but mostly from intercourse with train soldiers and other echelons inmates. What was passed by way of mouth to each other. Thus rumors accumulated: the most diverse – bad and good, hopeful and disillusioning, truthful and false.

I remember our joy when having got a newspaper somewhere we read about the Germans rout near Moscow. I remember both our pain and admiration when reading and re-reading the handed over from car to car articles of Ilya Ehrenburg, a popular writer those days.

While moving meanwhile along the bridge connecting Saratov and Engels cities we crossed the Volga River and passed by that same Gryzi station in the Volga Region Germans Autonomous Republic whereto we were destined according to our papers.

That fact was of no significance though; we were lost in the mess of echelons, cars, and people going from everywhere to nowhere.

Those living conditions could not but tell on human health. But what was strange was we had neither of “traditional” sicknesses such as grippe, tonsillitis, flu. Infectious diseases occurred, but we were lucky not to have them epidemic.

Those not in the know of our country those days, those who were born after the war are sure to be interested after having read the above: how one could live in that environment? But nevertheless, we did survive.

Our echelon was moving slowly to the east, and we had absolutely no idea when that journey would end. Surely it could not be eternal?

I may seem to be drawing an over-ugly picture, laying it on thick. But I am simply trying to give a trustworthy account of the atmosphere those days, a chronology, evoking my own feelings and emotional experience, as well as psychology of people who found themselves in the unbearable living conditions.

We passed by Uralsk, Orenburg. At last we came to Orsk where the weather was intensely cold. Without winter overcoats, hats, gloves, and what is crucial – footwear – we seemed to be doomed. But the survival fight was still on: we bandaged our arms and legs with some rags, newspapers.

Our nutrition was mostly frozen potatoes. I had only summer footwear. My feet were frostbitten. I feel the effects to this day.

We had already guessed that in accordance with elementary geography we had only one route left for us – further on into Siberia. It was doubtless. And here His Majesty Chance has played one of its rather rare kind tricks on us. We noticed the station trackmen informing the echelon master about something after they had inspected the wheels of our car. Nobody knew what was said.

But once, while in Orsk, our populated car was uncoupled and driven to the station dead end. We spent several days in complete ignorance, and nobody could explain clearly what was awaiting us ahead and what we were to do. Being a part of the echelon before that, the authorities had to deal with our progressive movement, if only through necessity of releasing the tracks for other trains; but now we stopped being a nuisance and nobody was interested in our fates.

THE ROUTE IS CHANGED

It was not until the inhabitants of our car started making a fearful fuss in the offices of the Orsk station threatening with complaints to "Stalin himself" that the repair men appeared at our car. They changed something in it, something was repaired under it. Several days more passed. And then one day an elderly station worker looked into our unfortunate car.

"Hey, you, what are you doing here? But you'll freeze to death for sure!" The car inhabitants started stirring all together. The worker ran somewhere, and then came back.

"Hey, you ought not go to Siberia. You'll perish there! Would you like to the south, to warmth?"

"We do!" was the mutual uproar of our miserable car inhabitants seeming to breathe out their last. He rushed out once more. Sometime after he returned followed by a man in a red service cap (controller to all appearance) who ordered the pusher to hook our car, and… couple it to the southward echelon!

And in this way, owing to a plain worker, our route was changed, and our fate with it. The train was moving southward. Again – a span, a stop, approaching train, moving restart. Days and nights. Hunger, despair, obscurity. But well, there is indeed Aktyubinsk already, warmer, warmer, still warmer. Kyzyl-Orda.

At a station amid Golodnaya [Hungry] Steppe one morning we saw a camel caravan and natives in the striped robes who were gazing at us.
Central Asia! Aral Sea (it still existed then). Fish, fish, fish! We stuffed ourselves with fish. Amu-Darya! We remembered our school geography textbooks! The faces of our fellow travelers softened. Fruits, vegetables! In abundance!

Kindhearted local residents regaled us with refreshments puzzled by the "miracle" in freight cars brought to them and mumbled something in their undecipherable language.

Clear blue sky, night stars! No shooting, no bombing, no aircraft hum overhead! Electric light at the stations! The windows are not pasted over with paper and newspapers! No sirens wailing! It seemed unreal!

And at last – the long-expected city that has taken its stand as an legendary evacuation capital – Tashkent!

Arrival to Tashkent was anticipated to be the end of our long-suffering epic. But somewhere, someone (could it be the unforgettable Moses pointing his finger?) must have been "managing and distributing". And we, who were eagerly anticipating the order to unload, were driven further, to another "promised land". The railroad part of that evacuation "exodus" soon came to its end. After a while we alit at last from our car to solid earth in one of the Uzbekistan administrative centers – Namangan. As if from aboard the ship after a stormy gale.

WE ARE THE NEW ASIANS

We did not stay too long at the square neighboring the Namangan railway station. The weather was chilly. Several hundreds of people in the square were soon distributed without going into details as to their profession, or skills, or age. "Sorting" was quick.

Our group of about the same number as in the car was prescribed to live, and work, and wait for the war end (those who would survive) in Djida-Kapa, a kishlak or Uzbek village.

Soon a transport from that kishlak arrived. It was an "arba" – the sole vehicle for transportation of freight and often (as with us) people. An arba was a large cart with two shafts and two wheels of up to 2 meters in diameter and a platform for the load. Between the shafts a horse was harnessed carrying a wooden saddle on its back occupied by a "driver". A smaller arba was drawn by a donkey, its back was

also saddled. The wheels height made passable muddy roads. Weather did not affect it.

There were no cars in that vicinity, and Russian-style carts were unknown.

I would like to mention that Uzbekistan of those days had still another carrier – rather exotic and purely Asiatic – a camel. Neither arba, nor cart were needed, the camels were simply burdened. And a superior carrier it was: low fuel consumption (pasturage – camel's thorn); self-sufficiency (for days without food); high cross-country ability (long, high legs – moves across any road, impassable ones included); "super cross-country carrier" – a symbol of Uzbek traditional life.

After a dozen miles along the narrow clay country-road our caravan arrived into… medieval times as we perceive them in our conscience.

Djida-Kapak had a kolkhoz or collective farm where we were to stay, work, and remember all our lives long.

I am asked from time to time, "Efim, how you can bear remembering all that?" And I answer, "To forget – that's what I cannot do".

Djida-Kapa kishlak was big. Five kolkhozes occupied its territory. Their management offices were in the neighboring buildings in the center. Just there the nearest to them wasteland overgrown with weeds was adorned with five identical Stalin sculptures.

Five kolkhozes – five sculptures. About two and a half meters each. Those sculptured cement-cast Stalins were almost shouldering each other "looking" at the goats and sheep grazing around and at one another.

Who can remember to-day that the like sculptures of the "great leader for all times and people, our own father and teacher" during his life-time numbered hundreds of thousands throughout the country?

I remember how those sculptures were eliminated after the Stalin's death and disclosure of his cult. Many of them were thrown into the pits dug nearby, and committed to earth. I imagine puzzled archeologists of the future who have dug out territory of ancient Russia stretching on both sides of the Ural Mountains those innumerable man-made idols – graven images of a mustached man!

"Medieval" is a term used purposefully. It is impossible to otherwise describe the mode of living, culture, morals and manners, customs, implements of production, methods of cultivation we have seen. It was another civilization, absolutely unfamiliar for us, although it was presumed to be a Soviet socialist one, wherein we had to learn how to live.

As for socialism, well, as we soon understood it was native, local one with almost undetectable changes in the executive powers originating from long before the 1917 revolution. Anyhow, the dekhkanes – Uzbek farmers – perceived it as unchanged.

The kolkhoz chairman appointed “from above” rather than being elected properly from their midst was taken for the former bai – a landlord. His “courtiers” forcibly urged people to work. The workers were not paid.

We, the evacuated, were treated a little bit different than the native farmers - guardedly. The local authorities naïvely regarded us as being sent by Stalin’s – a “celestial” - on his personal instructions, and we were not to be treated as the local natives; at the beginning we were not forced to work: there was understanding that worn-out and starved women and children could not be of great help.

When we started to work later on we were given rice soup with a flat bread during lunch break directly in the fields. On “happy” days the “good” foreman could provide us with even one and a half flat bread. And it was the sole remuneration of our labor.

But all this was still ahead. And just now we were driven to some incomprehensible structure. It turned to be a cotton drying room.

We occupied a large room adjacent to it, the forty square meters of which had become our home. Awaiting for our arrival, several dozens of metal cots not exceeding a meter and a half length each were installed. Earthen floor. Wood-burning stove. Our living accommodation was in semi-basement, with two glazed windows below ground level. It was always dark owing to the heaps of cotton covering the windows outside. No water supply, no lavatory, not to speak of electric light. It was like a place in a storybook.

The sleeping places were assigned quickly. Three in a row, the beds were pushed together across. A sort of separate “family” compartments appeared. The kolkhoz officials gave us a little flour, rice, kerosene.

We were favored by the kishlak residents who presented some household utilities to us – buckets, crockery, and kerosene lamp. We were happy and did not grumble. We couldn’t wait to start human living at last. In short, an instant “commune” was organized.

The military men spouses started receiving money according to the attested certificates (a part of a front-line husband wages if he was alive and not in captivity). Something else could be bought for that money, although at a very high price.

My mother and I were a separate family. There were only two of us. No army men in our family, father having passed before the war started. Thus, we obtained neither money, nor provisions. What was our food then? From time to time two or three kilograms of flour or rice were apportioned.

I give the military men wives their due who received bread payok (ration) for their families. Distributing bread between their family members and catching my hungry eyes they used to cut off a tiny slice for me too. And such was my nutrition at the beginning, until I started working.

We barely survived the 1941-42 winter. South as it was, but still it was a cold winter. No help could be expected from anywhere. The local residents starved, and we starved. Typhoid and other diseases became more commonplace.

That winter was marked by a young woman's death of typhoid, which orphaned her two kids. We watched a four-year-old girl die of dysentery. It is a pity to note caused little stress. People became hardened and blunt under the circumstances, with the feeling of doom prevailing over their own existence.

The kolkhoz used to provide us with turnips and fodder beet. But you had to know the way to boil it to become edible. With single small stove and without fuel, with so many people around it presented rather a problem.

And suddenly a "criminal" decision dawned upon us. Both windows of our room were completely blocked by cotton heaps from outside. And we made up our minds. Taking out a piece of window glass, we started fishing out cotton to use it as a fuel.

It is unimaginable what we could have undergone if it became known. The most likely version was the KGB--the state security service--(and they were everywhere, in any smallest god-forsaken place of the enormous country) considering it to be an act of state sabotage, subversive activity, embezzlement at best. But we were preoccupied with one and the only thing: never to lose that inexhaustible fuel source.

Raw cotton burns badly, it smolders. But we managed to warm ourselves, to prepare our plain brew of turnip, fodder beet, bran, and even some rice. We used to get it from time to time.

Mornings through evenings food was prepared in turns. Older boys and girls were sitting around the stove controlling the process and informing the adults, "steaming already". And oh, the joy of it: "boiling!"

War was war of course. Sentry patrols were posted. They were watching the outside in order to give an advance notice about the unwanted visitors because nobody had to see what we were burning in our stove.

I have mentioned elsewhere that it seemed to be medieval times. Having to face it against our will we behaved accordingly.

Neither kerosene for lamps, nor candles – and even to that we adapted. In the midst of our commune a folk handyman and sage teacher was found.

We had an elderly woman among us who had spent her whole life in a god-forsaken village and was village-life wise. She taught us how to find edible growth, medicinal herbs. She enabled us to light our room in the evenings, if only to a small extent. It was very simple: you had to split into thin strips the wooden planks from the broken old boxes. Days were spent in preparing the required quantity of those dried pine planks. In the evening, with growing darkness, somebody – the boys were about to fight for the right to do that – started that solemn performance.

With a match fire was set to the first plank, the next got fire from the first, and so on, and so forth. A plank was on fire for few minutes, illuminating the room.

The same old woman taught how to make threads. Cotton provided raw material. And it was abundant. To knit those threads into sweaters, jackets, socks, shawls became a routine business.

In the dim, flickering light of burning planks the women spent their evenings in incessant knitting, and sang melancholy Ukrainian songs.

We did not need water, it was plentiful. The system of irrigation ditches called "aryks", served as an uninterrupted water-supply.

Aryks were ditches with irrigation water, whether broad or narrow, deep or shallow which went along the sides of the streets passing through industrial premises, stock-raising farms, collective-farm (kolkhoz) fields, the peasant farmsteads and vegetable gardens.

Aryks became the single water-supply source. We took water to drink and to prepare food. In the aryks we washed laundry, washed ourselves, bathed. It was truly handy! You are thirsty – come up to aryk at any place, stoop over, palm up some water and quench your thirst. A little upstream just in that aryk children bathe (and urinate). And further upstream the diapers are washed. No one is surprised and going to complain – everything is as it should be. And how could it be otherwise? It is a habitual life for the Uzbeks, and now we lived the same way. I evidenced a scene once when an obvious consumptive was spitting blood into aryk from which a man downstream was drinking water scooped with his hands.

Sometimes the unique potential of human brain to remember some insignificant, negligible incidents of many decades ago stuns me. The mention of the aryk triggers a funny episode stuck in my memory. Though it depends…

I was sitting in a tree in somebody's orchard stuffing my shirt with apricots. Quite a trivial pursuit of a hungry boy. It was an early morning. The proprietor's house is in the immediate vicinity. Some noise is heard out of doors from under the mosquito-protective gauze bed curtain.

I was about to finish my hasty work, climbing down and running away. But suddenly from under the curtain a naked Uzbek emerged and headed to an aryk – near the one over which I was sitting three or four meters high in the tree. Without noticing me he started washing his privy parts. He was not bothered by thought that someone might be drinking water from that aryk downstream, but I was horrified by imagining what would await me if he caught me. I was lucky to escape safely.

It needs to be mentioned that the natives became less sympathetic to the refugees since our arrival due to their increased number. This became especially evident when an orphanage had arrived into the kishlak.

Three 17-year-old lads from Odessa appeared once at our place. Their tales of how they had managed that way without parents, relatives, or simple acquaintances now escape my memory. They must have missed their train, or found themselves lost in the turmoil and mess of the war. They were good boys. Judging from their behavior and speech – from cultured families. They had nothing with them – neither food, nor clothes – except for those on them.
The kolkhoz has clad them in the identical striped wadded trousers and jackets. They looked like twins. They slept where could find place, ate what they managed to get or steal. What else could they do? Sometimes they visited us. Ever smiling, witty – pure Odessans, never despondent, with jokes and humorous tales; they were interesting for us.

Soon one of them was killed. Hacked to death with an axe. I guess he penetrated into somebody's orchard or vegetable garden. A regional inspector came who used to walk around the kishlak carrying the blooded axe. But he did not manage to find either the owner of the axe, or the killer.

I'll tell what happened to another one. Once we were loading the cotton that was stored in open air. The collected cotton is stored in rectangular stacks four or five meters high. The stack base is provided with through, rather spacious ventilation tunnels.

An unpleasant smell spread soon. It became more and stronger as we unloaded one of those stacks. At last we stumbled over its source – it was a decomposed corpse of another Odessan. They were known to have their nightly lodging in those tunnels – they were warm and comfortable there. He must have been covered by that tons-heavy cotton heap. Or he might have been killed too, and hidden. The officials were not disturbed by the fact. And still there was none to worry about the dead Russian waif.

The third Odessan moved to our drying room and became for a while a part of "the family". When he reached 18 years we saw him enter the army ranks.

Finding ourselves in a far-off uncivilized kishlak, we had no access to the outer world. There was neither post office, nor telephone, nor radio. They had only a post office manager who used a donkey-harnessed cart to go at regular intervals to a regional center – Uychi settlement. He received newspapers, mail – all that was distributed among the postmen who delivered it to the addresses. I later became one of those postmen.

One can certainly understand the families that were not aware of their front-line soldier addresses, as well as those soldiers themselves who did not know where their families were. The year 1942 was the toughest in this respect. My mother and I were in the dark as to whereabouts of our relatives. Later on communication between people scattered across that enormous country was put

right: a special center was established – the state information bureau in Buguruslan city where information was gathered.

Mother sent a request and soon we got the address of our close relatives who were evacuated from Chernigov. They lived in Naryn (Kirgiz Republic). It was an invaluable support for my mother to have a chance for communicating with them. But they also were ignorant as to the fate of her parents. Their tragedy was not disclosed until 1944 when Yampol, the town of their residence, was liberated.

What was going on in the world, and in the fronts, which was of the utmost interest, we could get to know from the national Russian newspapers "Pravda" and "Izvestiya (News)" that were very late in reaching us. Arrival of those newspapers was taken as a little holiday, and more so if along with the front-line news they contained Ilya Ehrenburg's articles and poems by Konstantin Simonov (a popular war-time lyric poet).

Those days were rich in different problems, quite unexpected sometimes. It could be a panic we had to go through, or even a personal safety issue. A group of unprotected and mostly young women living in one place inspired "morbid" interest in the local "Don Juans". Under pretty influence of wine they approached our abode at daytime at first – "delicately" and sometimes at nights, far gone in intoxication they tried to enter by force, with curses and threats. Panic-stricken women locked themselves and withstood the "siege" by drawing the table up to the door and backing it up.

They feared to leave the room at nights, and there was a bucket suitable for the lavatorial needs.

Nobody was there to complain to. No police in the kishlak. When the kolkhoz chairman was addressed he simply shrugged his shoulders being unable to understand what he was asked. What is more, we did not know Uzbek language and had to convey our request into pantomime.

Lack of language, inability to understand a great deal of what was said, and failure to clearly formulate a request or complaint emerged into a major problem of our Uzbekistan life.

Those who found themselves in Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Namangan, and even small townships had easier life. Russian was understood by many Uzbeks there. But in a kishlak you could not find one speaking or understanding Russian. At the same time subsistence was more easily got there. Especially when we learned the Uzbek language. It was a necessity at first, and we got better and better at it over time. We, the boys, at all times mixing with local kids, were quick to grasp it first. From 1941 through 1945 when I lived in Uzbekistan I became rather fluent in the Uzbek language. And later on it was still on my memory. Youth acquisitions stay with one forever.

I still have a perfect command of the Ukrainian language, being my native since childhood.

In the winter 1942 my mother has caught a jaundice. She needed to be hospitalized urgently. There was a "hospital" in the kishlak – a unit with a doctor and two or three women – nurses and nurse aids – and a carter.

The doctor came, examined the patient and promised to take her to the hospital, for which purpose transport was to be sent. Soon "ambulance" has arrived: it was a narrow four-wheeled cart drawn by a horse.

The carter put my mother into the cart with my assistance but treated me with little consideration. He told me to go home.

The times became still more difficult. I had to take care both of myself and my mother now. The hospital nutrition was insufficient of course, and medical treatment was below all standards.

The hospital was a long way off, and to reach it one had to get across an old large cemetery bordering it (truly handy!). Leaving the hospital once and crossing the cemetery I got trapped in the old burial place. According to Muslim custom, a grave with the deceased wrapped in a sheet is shielded with logs and earth over them. The logs got rotten, and I fell through-- rather an unpleasant experience.

Mother recovered, and life went on.

My mother, by the way, in 1942 was 30– only 17 years older than me, bore her age well, and was taken for my elder sister.

It is an uneasy task to name all hardships we had to overcome in Uzbekistan due to its climate. High temperature (heat up to 40C and more), abundant water-retaining places (rivers, canals, aryks, water-saturated rice fields) presented favorable conditions for snakes, tarantulas, scorpions, centipedes and others.

During the hours of darkness the air was thick with clouds of gnats and mosquitoes. The local residents spent nights in special gnat-protecting gauze tents, it was hot and stuffy inside but it was the sole protection. We took the pants the Uzbek women used to wear to be a fashion style, but after our women have got their legs covered with gnat-bite sores and scabs they started wearing those baggy trousers too.

The ceilings in their houses were wooden beams rolled tightly together; hosts of malignant insects used to nest there. Those "neighbors" made me suffer once: in my sleep I felt a sudden pain in my right arm. Under the light we saw a big greenish-yellow scorpion, the one that had stung my arm. I had a terrible pain in my shoulder joint all night long.

An Uzbek woman, our neighbor, spread some antidote ointment over the wound: cotton oil mixed with scorpion poison. We were scared to death because all that took place in May when the scorpion bite, particularly if it was an old one, was the most dangerous. But by the morning I got better and survived.

The winter of 1942 meanwhile was coming to its end. We were moved to another communal lodging – a big room in one of the buildings at the kolkhoz farmstead. New furniture appeared: the Uzbek four-square wooden divans, more comfortable compared to the previous sleeping places. Windows were not shaded, and we had light in day-time.

And day after day through the windows we could watch one of the Uzbek mounted division unit soldiers instructed and trained before being sent to a front-line. Our intercourse with the soldiers was an unbelievable mix of gestures and Russian-Uzbek languages. Besides, they frequently helped us with foods.
By that spring, hunger has become dominant, the kolkhoz storehouses were empty, local population was starved, provisions came to their end or were tax-delivered to the state; and a reprieve was still far ahead. The situation was much worse in towns. Sometimes I had to visit Namangan; the sight of the starved, barely moving, and mostly simply lying at the street sides people was terrifying.

NO WORK – NO FOOD

After several months in the kishlak we got accustomed, took our bearings, mastered the language to some extent, got acclimatized, and - if it were not for the damned hunger!!! – understood that it was the place where one could live. And as if grasping it, the kolkhoz officials set all able-bodied members of our commune to socially useful labor. Stop horsing around. We are short of workers. Which fact was actually indisputable.

I was 13 by that time and with good reason was regarded able-bodied. A material remuneration was promised: a wheat-cake daily. We were organized in a team and given a foreman , a young tubercular Uzbek unfit for military service. A small arba was provided pulled by a donkey, and work was allotted.

The work was removal of dung from farmsteads with cows to fertilize the fields. Our 15 or 16 strong women and teenagers team armed with spades and wheelbarrows used to move along the streets. The foreman inquired if any dung was available, and we took the contents outside, to the cart pulled by a donkey. At noon the foremen brought hot flatbread, and even the most exquisite food could not stand the comparison with their taste.

I am at a loss recollecting all diverse and numerous work I had to fulfill in the kishlak those years.

One may assume today's agricultural methods and tools to be not the same, but then we were simply stunned to come across the Middle Ages. Manual farming was specific for most of the land, it was hoed.

The ancient wooden plow was still widely used. The plow was dragged either by a man-driven horse or cow.

Rice cultivation was the most labor-intensive and killing. After digging up a field it was water-flooded, and rice was planted into a half-meter deep water. With sprouts above the water, two weedings were needed when you had to stoop under the burning sun to dig out the weeds trying to hand-extract them with their roots. The water was infested with diverse stinging insects and snakes.
Unaccustomed to that kind of work, our women had their legs and arms covered with sores and boils. Neither preventive, nor treatment means were existent. It was a painful hell of a job. But it had to be done, and the task had to be accomplished, and only then you could get a flatbread and a added half and thick rice soup, with horse-flesh sometimes, boiled in a large cauldron just on the spot.

And what a luxury it was to straighten one's back in the shade, to nestle down and savor such "delicacies"!

The principal crop in Uzbekistan is cotton. Its significance can hardly be overstated, especially in war time. It is not merely cotton fabric but also raw material for weapons-grade powder without which weapons become useless. Hence, cotton has become a strategic produce.

I had different occasions to experience all kinds of cotton tending and picking. Picking was the acme of the cotton campaign: the work itself was not tiring but the imposed outturn figure was scaring: 50 kilos a day; it is enormous weight for dry cotton. For us, the refugees with no experience of the kind that quota was unrealizable, but we tried hard and notwithstanding all complications got our field dinner.

The picked cotton was packed into the huge stacks right on the spot and stored in the open air where it could not stay for long: autumn was coming with its rains, and the cotton had to stay dry to be delivered to Namangan cotton-cleaning plants for further processing. Transportation became a problem.
All means were used: horses, donkeys, even camels – but it was insufficient: thousands tons of cotton had to be delivered to their place of destination.

The military situation was tense; the second front was impatiently awaited to be opened in Europe by our allies America and Great Britain. Gun powder was a vital necessity for ammunition producing plants.

America appeared of considerable technical assistance then, in 1944: to help us meet a transportation issue the required number of "Studebaker" powerful trucks were delivered in rather intricate ways along with dozens of American instructors and Soviet military units manned with soldiers – the drivers.

After a short training period the Americans left, and the plants were supplied with cotton brought by "Studebakers" driven by Russian soldiers.

But the problem still remained open: the plants were in need of manpower, and the majority of men were at the front. Yet that issue was quickly settled by a "sage" Josef Stalin known never to have problems with slaves.

Uzbekistan, like the rest of the country those years, had abundant local "people's enemies" repressed for different "crimes" invented by Soviet powers. Why drag them along all that long way to Siberian camps if they could be of use right where they were! The cotton-cleaning plants were promptly barbed-wired, watch-boxes were provided in all corners, primitive dwellings were constructed (no Siberia really – warmth!), and the plants obtained free manpower.

Those "zones" within the city limits encouraged the convict relatives to communicate with them over the barbed wire, to throw bread inside. I watched once how it was: we had an Uzbek acquaintance whose brother was accused of "jabbering": he put the German small arms above the Soviet – well, and a prison term he got "for spreading hostile propaganda". Now brothers could communicate only through the barbed wire and were careful about their words.

Besides its intended application cotton is of great help in the local residents' domestic existence: after picking the stems are cut out and delivered to homes to become the principal fuel. Much later, when mother was working at the kolkhoz managing office, she could use temporarily a donkey with a small arba. Perched in its saddle I took home the required fuel.

Those who read these memoirs are likely to criticize me for the excessively detailed picture of my environment; both nature and technology of jobs I had to do; description of certain people; everyday life, morals and manners of the whole nation. They may be right. But it was my habitat: it got changed from time to time making me adapt to it and resisting all my attempts to modify it.

There were several instances when I found myself at life's crossroads having to start all over again which often caused irretrievable effects. But all that was yet ahead of me being only 13 then. And I describe atmosphere of my childhood when I lived and perceived the world through the prism of war, privation, and hunger.

The severe summer of 1942 came. Along with fighting hunger our thoughts were occupied by the depressing news from the fronts. Not a day seemed to come without news of another surrendered city, of new destinations brought into action: Rostov, Kalinin, Stalingrad, North Caucasus. How many more?

A lot of new refugees joined us at the kishlak – from Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, and Minsk. Many families found themselves scattered across the different regions of Russia, Middle Asia, and Siberia. But having even located their relatives, people could not join them: although the train service was available – I mean passenger trains, and not echelons – one had to acquire a special permit, all private travels between the cities were prohibited.

It was that summer when a prominent event has occurred in our kishlak. A large orphanage was established in Djida-Kapa for several hundreds of so-called "war children" – the orphaned ones, lost during journeys, or abandoned by parents. A lot of the repressed "people's enemies" children were among them. Those

teenagers (mainly 10-14 years old) became a permanent headache for the kishlak residents. Undernourished at the orphanage, they hunted through the kishlak, homesteads, gardens, and orchards looking for food.

Most important for us, the evacuated Russian-speaking children, was a seven-year Russian school established owing to the presence of the orphanage.

I missed the previous year, but that autumn could start my sixth grade. New acquaintances appeared, new friends, the boys like me.

But we didn't play games – we had to procure food to supplement our meager living. We tackled the problem in our own way, bagging fruits from the private orchards. Setting out on our "hunt" we took handmade long sticks with hooks with us. We climbed over the orchard wall or a tree and cleared branches of the fruits which were hidden under the shirts and stuffed into our pockets.

Surely we ran hazards. We could be beaten or maimed by the embittered orchard owners. But our hunger prevailed and besides, we wanted to treat our mothers to fruits.

But above all was fishing in which I was instructed by one of my friends. I have mentioned elsewhere that water reservoirs were abundant in that neighborhood: canals, lakes, significant aryks and deep Syr Daria River of course; all those full to the brim with fish. Early in the morning we went to the selected place, cast our primitive fishing-rods and watched the bobber; and it was such a pleasure to observe its movements when fish bit. That instance you had to be smart and fast: fish had to be timely yanked and pulled ashore – a cat-fish or a big "sazan". Fish became an invaluable support for my mother and me throughout all our undernourished years in Uzbekistan.

Every now and then, when the catch was substantial mother scaled fish, salted a little and I went to the Namangan market to sell it; earnings were spent on bread and other foods.

The same year by the end of summer my mother, having mastered the Uzbek language more or less, found a place at the management office due to her bookkeeping experience. It was easier as against the field work.

Our commune gradually dispersed, and owing to my mother whose work was valued we were allotted a separate room at a house of an Uzbek woman with two children whose husband was at the front.

We furnished our dwelling: two beds, a little table, a couple of chairs. It was a palace compared to all our previous habitations. Glassless window with a shutter; walls with niches for household utensils; a stove. Earthen floor, as everyone had it, was matted.

Waking up one day in the absence of mother who was at work I heard rustling under the bed. I was terrified to spot a big snake there. I jumped out of the window and fetched our landlady's son, two years older than me. With unruffled

calm he took the snake out assuring me it was not a poisonous one, but it took long until I could recover from the frightr.

On September 1, 1942 I began the sixth grade of the Russian seven-year school after a year-and-a-half-break in studies. Certified teachers in all subjects were found among the refugees, or sent from Namangan.

And I have to stress once again: it was an extremely lean year; "attached" to the collective-farm (kolkhoz) refugees like us used to receive from time to time some food handouts, but the teachers had only wages insufficient to buy enough bread. With three or four hundred grams of bread a day they were always hungry and emaciated.

I recollect a Russian language and literature teacher, a Muscovite, an excellent teacher and very kind person. His looks were awful, it must have been the last stage of disease, but he had to work, to give lessons and keep up discipline. And we (oh, that children's cruelty!) behaved outrageously with impunity. Standing beside his back we aped him, with a drop under his nose and laughed when, weak as he was, he could not whisk it off. Soon he passed away from exhaustion and we felt pity recollecting him. Maybe because a new, more strict teacher has replaced him.

Once we were visited by a chemistry teacher. She asked my mother if perhaps her son needed help in preparing lessons. Mother was surprised by her visit, but when that lady openly asked if we had something to eat, everything clicked into place: her face got swollen from hunger. My mother fed her, gave some food to take along, and the teacher thanked and wept… of shame.

Everything was in need. Garments, footwear, medicine, kerosene. Salt was very difficult to get, frequently we went without it. A hundred grams of salt could be a present from a visitor.

Absence of matches was a separate problem: they simply disappeared from everyday use. We were unsuccessful in our attempts of striking fire from a flint like primeval people. But the decision was simple: we rolled up a handful of straw and roamed the kishlak looking for fire.

Walking along the street and knocking at the wicket-gates we asked, "Ut bar?" (any fire?). If the hearth was on, that straw roll was taken in, laden with a couple of hot coals, and returned. To share fire was a sacred duty of anyone, and we never were refused. At home that smolder turned into fire.

The long-expected new harvest time came at last. The belly-pinched people seemed to be expecting nothing better than that event of their lives. Rice has formed ears, fields were drained of water, and rice was left to ripen under the baking sun. Then rice was hand-harvested. Wheat kept almost abreast with it. It was cut in like manner and bound into bundles.

All that harvest was taken to the special round plots of pounded earth. Grain was thrashed there. A wooden pole marked the center of the plot. A wooden shaft was fastened to it with five-seven belts pulled by cows and sometimes by horses. Rice or wheat bundles were arranged in a circle and the process started.

We had only to hurry them up – and the boys, me included, eagerly did the job; the animals went circle after circle hoofing the crop to let grains out of the ears. Straw was taken away after that, and grain was fanned by casting it up with wooden shovels for the mild wind to blow the husks away.

Well, and next was – "all to front, all to victory!" The whole harvest was to be delivered over to the state, and so it went. Grain loaded carts went to elevators and barns. Women, elders, teenagers, and the sick – all who had grown that crop received nothing. They survived without complaints owing to their gardens and to what they surely had to steal from the fields.

Some grain was left in the kolkhoz own barns for possible unforeseen needs which included providing us, the refugees without their own properties.

Garments or footwear presented fewer problems due to the warm climate. And did we really need much? Material made by the local weavers was available, and more so that we gradually slipped into the Uzbek style. Men used to wear plain sackcloth shirts and formless white cotton trousers. At whichever season a striped cotton robe was worn over that, legs were thrust into sandals, in winter at the fields – into the boots. Women used to wear embroidered skull-caps, always wide and colorful dress, baggy pantaloons, and footwear. Women, young and unmarried in particular, undoubtedly tried to diversify that outfit varying material quality and coloration.

In my description of the Uzbek women's outfit I cannot miss their mode of life and social standing, at least at the time of my stay. The majority of the married Uzbek women, whether they were rural or urban, had to hide their faces from men and wear paranja (yashmak) – thick black horse hair gauze. To have it fixed on the head they put a sort of a round braid over it, thus covering their face and the upper body. Still over that they put a coat-resembling cape to hide the back of their whole stature.

After wedding the girls put paranja on and wore it throughout their lives. Only at home, in the absence of strangers they could do without it. Only the husband and those of nearest kin could see their faces. In order to escape wearing rather heavy paranja when going out into the street for a short stroll, she covered her head with a thick cloak and held it in her arms to shield herself from being ogled by men.

Wearing paranja was not related to oppression or absence of women's civil rights by local residents. It was absolutely common and requisite even from the women's viewpoint. And more to it, the Uzbek women disapproved our women for

their open faces believing it was sinful and improper. I was extremely flattered watching women hide their faces from my eyes when I was only 14 or 15. I felt myself a man at those moments.

Limiting herself to a cape while in kishlak, a woman had to wear paranja going to the city.

That habit presented serious perplexity during war-time. The public center of Namangan, like of any other settlement of the country those years, was a market with its crowds of people. Deserters, i.e. men in hiding to escape conscription, wore paranja to mask themselves. Round-ups were involved from time to time to catch them.

The market was cordoned off by militiamen and military patrols. Only one exit was left– the gates where the paranja was rudely torn down to see who was under it. All were panic-stricken, wild cries and yells rent the air, but the fugitives were sometimes caught in that manner. Their fates are sorrowful and inexorable. They were shot without trial. To punish them and intimidate the others.

Everyone knew what had happened in our kishlak. Two fugitives were found, taken to the fields, and shot.

The autumn of 1942 came. Work in the fields was over, rice, wheat, vegetables, fruits, grapes were harvested, as well as the major product – cotton. Life became easier.

About this time "Uraza" was at its end – a month-long fast when one was allowed to eat only after sunset. The last day of "Uraza" is celebrated with inevitable festive pilau. Kishlak comes to life, aroma of pilau fills the air, kids deliver it in fine dishes to friends and relatives – very nice and strictly observed tradition. That rite is of no religious significance but might have religious origin. As a matter of fact, exercising Moslem religious rites was not specific for the kishlak life with neither mosque, nor mullah.

Autumn was a time for the flocks to return from the upland pastures where they had been grazing since spring. It was a truly absorbing sight: a column of animals coming down from the Tien-Shan mountains with Afghanistan behind them, and along the kishlak main street at their foot; animals had their yield beside them – the extremely nice lambs and baby goats.

We could only feast our eyes upon the Tien-Shan snow-capped peaks; it was a long way to go, difficult and dangerous: settled down in the mountains were the so-called "basmaches" – well-to-do local farmers who escaped thereto during the civil war after the 1917 revolution. They persevered in combating the Soviet power brought to their land by Red Army.

By the end of 1942 my mother became the kolkhoz deputy chief accountant. We were provided a room in an office building occupied by other "smart" persons: the evacuated teachers, registered nurses, a druggist, etc. – all of them with their

families. My mother was held in respect, and her position enabled us to have additional provision from food in stock, and moreover, we were provided with a small plot at a rice field which we cultivated ourselves.
I matured, got stronger, and attended the school sixth grade regularly; in April, 1943 I turned 14.

The same summer my illegal trespassing "activity" on gardens and orchards with subsequent withdrawal of fruits and vegetables became legal and lawful: I started working at the local stockpiling station. It was a part of the state tax agency dealing with collection of tax in kind from the rural population in the form of fruits and vegetables.

Our work was simple: a group of the evacuees-teenagers (local teenagers never participated in that "dirty" business) led by a foreman on a donkey-pulled cart went along the kishlak streets and fearlessly (we knew we were "under the state protection"!) robbed the orchards bringing boxes with fruits to the "supply depot". Stunned owners were left with a useless piece of paper saying, "Fruit tax exempt". Fruits were never weighed or taken stock of; city transport used to withdraw them somewhere.

Such was my work during summer holidays. Our family was sure to have a plentiful supply of fruits without my risk to be caught.

Together with that principal job I spent the summer of 1943 fishing; owing to the above we had ready money from selling both fish and rice from our own plot. Those wares were sold at the Namangan market where I used to go on foot covering 10-12 kilometers; I was 14 and it presented no difficulty for me. Now we could buy clothes, footwear, and "urban" bread.

While in the city I used to spend several hours at the local reading-room with books and magazines which I missed badly in kishlak.

That year – 1943 – situation at the fronts: Stalingrad, Kursk, and other victories of the Red Army installed optimism and hopes for the nearing end of the war and returning home. Oh, how far off that end was, but our faith got stronger and became deep-seated which eased our lives.

I made friends with a neighbor – a physically strong big guy not enlisted due to some illness; a professional swimmer, he was a lifeguard before the war. He trained me, and by the summer end I could cross the broad and tumultuous Syr Daria River unassisted.

My friends and I spent our leisure time rambling for hours over the country and finding new ponds, lakes, streams, overgrown shrubs and reeds where unseen before birds were nested – partridges and even pheasants; we felt ourselves the ground breakers of the places where no foot may trod.

We were experiencing dark times, but a keen interest to outward things together with natural youthful optimism prevailed. And today, indulging in

retrospection without claims to originality I say openly – happy was that time of our lives; and as to the future... those thoughts escaped us.

In autumn I started my seventh and the last, graduating school year. That 1943-44 school year was in no way remarkable for my mother's and my lives. Mother worked, hopefully anticipating news on liberating the area where her parents lived. The Soviet Army was attacking, and an everyday list of the liberated towns and villages dominated in the summaries of front operations.

A new hymn of the Soviet Union (today's Russia hymn follows its tune) was studied everywhere; Soviet soldiers and officers got straps to their shoulders – it was uncommon for us; a lot of wounded in the war appeared and we were enraptured by their medals and orders.

My personal life was nothing extraordinary except for...love.

Love approached me – clean, childish, exalted, and… incomprehensible in my 15 years. This moment should not be omitted in describing my life.
It was mathematics that gave a push. I wasn't a bad student, and finished the seventh grade a straight-A student, but mathematics was my weak point – it didn't come easy to me, moreover so that I didn't like its teacher and it must have been mutual dislike – I felt her unfriendliness towards me. She was a just that year newcomer from Namangan who was accommodated with her family – her sister with two children – at our house, and became our neighbor. It was a family of native Muscovites.

I made friends with her nephew Yura and from his talks gathered that judging from the math teacher's tales (and no doubt she used to share her experiences with her family) my reputation was not high with them. Yura had a sister – Sophochka Chernyakova, a handsome slim girl about my age. Her emergence made my consciousness unpredictable: I got to thinking about her with increasing frequency; I longed for provoking her sympathy and attention. And understood that I had to put on a front, and the only way was through her aunt – an awful shrew as to me; to be strict, it had to be through her subject, math I meant.

So I got down to the hated mathematics. After a time I was amazed to realize it was a comprehensible (thanks to love!) science. All successive years, by the way, at school, at the institute mathematics was not a problem for me. I was raised in her estimation at once, and she turned out a friendly and sympathetic young woman for me.

With Sophochka we made friends, started feeling mutual attraction, and sought each other's company; the whole world seemed to be shrunk to the two of us. I got ill once, caught high fever; and a faithful friend, she was permanently with me. We seemed to be close by all the time, and even mentally we were together. At the beginning of 1945 Sophochka went home to Moscow with her family, we sadly bid farewell to one another – and she disappeared from my life.

The radio in the kishlak was absent. News came with the newspapers, at random and very late. One may be amazed to-day at the speed the front and military songs got spread and passed to friends and relatives. We never knew the names of their composers and poets, but each one was met like a small holiday. Listening to them nowadays I recollect involuntary those bygone years when I have heard them for the first time, and people who surrounded me then.

In the meantime 1944 was on. I celebrated my 15th birthday, finished the seventh grade, and said good-bye to the Djida-Kapa kishlak: the next year I had to start my school in the city.

In the summer of the same year I was offered a job of the kolkhoz letter carrier "as a literate person with incomplete secondary education and command of both Russian and Uzbek languages".

Carrying letters turned out not as easy as I surmised at first: the streets, lanes, and the farmers' separate residences – several hundred all together – had neither numbers, nor names. It was my everyday headache when I received at the "central" post-office a pile of letters. Each address presented a puzzle, with numerous namesakes in the neighborhood. I had to resort to the help of surroundings: acquaintances, neighbors; sometimes letters needed to be opened to find "distinguishing features" of the addressee.

You could not be mindless of those letters; the majority arrived from the fronts without envelopes and with the return address "field mail". People lived awaiting for these letters with hope… and fear.

But it was not long when an unexpected and horrible reverse side of my seemingly harmless work turned out: the pioneering death notification appeared which I had to deliver to the instantly gone distraught with grief parents, wife, children, then the second, third. I became a devil incarnate, death messenger; I was regarded with horror when knocking at someone's door. In contrast to being gladly met when I brought a long anticipated "good" letter for which I was given some food and unfailing ruble or two, I was horrified by the above situation expecting violence or even stones thrown at me.

I had to invent a way to escape watching shock I was made to cause in people. After verifying the address I handed the death notification to the neighbors, and it appeared the best possible way out for me.

And the succeeding night through, I don't know why but it occurred nightly, violent cries and wail of the special hired weepers were heard from the sorrow befallen house; and up to the dawn the ritual was going on heard for a long distance; and people cursed the war.

Speaking of cries, sobs, and loud wails I recollected the same reaction but on another occasion. And the reason for those lamentations was the night of the so-called "military tax" and "military loan" withdrawal.

If employees of the state institutions and enterprises had specified sums deducted from their wages, the farmers having no money of their own had their taxes in kind withdrawn in the most severe and barbarous manner.

It was done at night – at day-time the potential tax-payers could escape. From the district town a car used to come full of NKVD or state security representatives and a couple of volunteers; if the house owner had no money to ransom himself a withdrawal took place, better say a legalized robbery of private property. Taken was all that got within easy reach: a domestic animal, whether cow or sheep, blankets, carpets, plates and dishes, "surplus products". The air was thick with the anguished cries and wail of the "tax-payers", but people were afraid to interfere, not knowing what the next night would bring and who would be the next victim.

Where the withdrawn property was taken and how it turned into a "contribution to the front" nobody knew. A large part of the robbery (you can't name it otherwise) sank into the warehouses and got to the chief executives.

NAMANGAN

Time for school was nearing. I was to start independent life in a town where my mother had rented a room for me at her acquaintance for a respective sum. I spent the 1944-45 school year in Namangan. The holidays were spent at my kishlak home where I indulged myself on my "native" element; met Sophochka and friends.

The Uzbeks among whom I existed during evacuation, by the way, "baptized" me (I don't remember the reason) Mirzaraim, the name I got so accustomed to that even introduced myself by that purely Uzbek name.
In Namangan I plunged into civilization: electric light, radio, numerous Russian society, and other attributes of modernity.

I remember how well after the Crimea had been liberated Namangan accepted several freight echelons with Crimean Tatars. They made it clear for us that Crimea was "cleared" of that full nation because of "collaboration with the German invaders".

It was strange to see women, tender age children, and elders accused of treachery. There must have been the reasons, but the very scale of the "action" could not but struck with its mass character, efficiency, and orderliness – like all implemented under the leadership of the "great Stalin".

The operation took 24 hours . In Uzbekistan those people with their hastily grabbed poor belongings were met grudgingly by officials who rendered almost no help in their new lives and forced them to survive on their own..

In 1945 my mother received tragic news: a letter from liberated Yampol – the settlement where her parents were left during occupation – contained information about their being in ghetto; they were unknown to be alive still. By that time we knew what had happened to Jews within the invaded areas, thus our hope to have grandmother Molka and grandfather Elya Balaban alive was slim.

As it became known later, my grandmother was rifle-butted when she left the ghetto territory to exchange something for food. Just then mother's underage sister Rachel also perished.

And my grandfather was lost in a concentration camp where was taken together with other Yampol ghetto inhabitants.

After Odessa was liberated we learned about my father's four sisters who were lost with their families during the German-Romanian occupation of the city. Just at that time my father-in-law Ilya Miltsman's relatives – 18 persons in total – were exterminated.

That is what Holocaust turned out to our family! Nothing but indignation can only be aroused by the modern interpreters of history who deny it! Documentary witness on our family tragedy during Holocaust please find enclosed in the Appendix to this book.

t was not until I got to America that I came to know from the Maidenbergs, our American relatives, reliable details of my grandmother's death told by a survived witness.

Should I narrate about my mother's state after such misfortune in life, and more so due to the hard emotional experience, hunger, hardships, and severe climate she got a grave illness – pellagra. Sores on her swollen legs were unbearable to look at, as well as pain she experienced. To escape the effects of pellagra doctors were unanimous in advising a change of climate.

The war was coming to its end; battlefields were transferred to Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other East European countries. At the large-scale maps we were happy to mark with small flags cities taken by our army, the unknown strange cities.

I was 16 by that time and received my first passport.

Looking back I realize that I have had more than enough of life experience in my childhood, boyhood, and youth. But has it been of any use further on? I don't know. I have no affirmative answer to that. Excessively contradictive that time was, and the very experience itself is full of diverse contradictions.

And at last the long awaited flag on our maps appeared. Berlin was taken! The day has come which was so intensely and impatiently anticipated all those long years. The day has come, so sincerely looked forward to. The day of great joy mixed with equally great sorrow. Ninth of May, 1945! Victory! Hitler's burned corps. The war was ended!

Whatever is said today about the past war it was an event achieved through suffering both of army and the nation on the whole. My child labor during wartime was a tiny contribution to it.

COMING BACK

Going home became real. But where to and when? After it became clear that fascist Germany was doomed to complete defeat and our victory was at hand, a lot of refugees left for their homes.

Returning to Turbov was of no sense. Nothing and nobody was there for us. My mother decided to go to Chernigov where her aunts Olya and Manya Maidenberg with their families had already returned to. We obtained their approval and mother was summoned to work at Chernigov. Without a summons one could not leave the evacuation locality.

All necessary documents were completed, work was cleared off, and we began our travels.

The first surprise was encountered at the Namangan railway station: in order to depart you had to enter a long succession of the like goers forming a huge crowd.

About two weeks were spent sitting on the bespattered floor, in unsanitary conditions, surrounded by crowds of the refugees on their way back.

And one fine day it was our turn. At last we entered a hard-seated carriage packed to its full with people and their belongings. Even the upper luggage rack was occupied by passengers. A whistle blew,the train started, the station departure platform slowly drifted past our windows. Our life under the Uzbekistan sun ended. We left that place never to return.

Recalling my Uzbekistan years I cannot but give high praise to the people with whom we took shelter. The Uzbeks are plain simple-hearted people without animosity and enmity against “Russians” (and all of us, quite like in America, were the “Russians”). For the most part they shared the wartime burdens with us as equals, and we, the fugitives, never felt any serious hostility.

Our way back mirrored the one four years ago, but in the more humane conditions and in another mood of course.

We did not reach Chernigov until a month or so. We had to change trains several times and wait for the next ones at the stations for seven-eight days. But what interesting and unexpected things we have seen! What extraordinary meetings, acquaintances, impressions!

The whole country, all people seemed to be moving. We were met by troop trains taking the ex-service front-line soldiers who came through in the return direction. Big portraits of Stalin were fixed on the locomotive fronts along with the

inscription “We won”. And once again, when the trains met air was rent with “Hurrah!” Today’s skeptics doubt the above but it really was so!

Once we came across survived prisoners of Auschwitz on their return; they showed the numbers tattooed on their shoulders. We were unaware of many things, the whole truth about fascism was still ahead.

The most terrifying was seen when we entered the area liberated from the invaders. Railway stations and buildings were utterly destroyed, temporary wooden constructions were erected instead. Burned out villages flew past the car windows. Only the brick flue funnels of the former wooden houses marked the places where people used to live before the war.

The stations were full of the disabled people, beggars, gutter children, thieves, and miserable lack-all men.

In the first postwar years I happened to travel, sometimes on the car roof or its footboard, across Ukraine and Belarus visiting different towns that had previously belonged to the military operations zone.

I paid attention to the differences in the appearances of those towns. Chernigov underwent complete destruction when no sense was felt in restoring the ruins. A judicious choice was made: to build up the former streets with new houses and to make streets where the houses used to stand. So said – so done! It will never occur to anybody to-day that foundations of the “pre-war civilization” underlay the present streets.

I saw burned-out Minsk. The house walls with empty smoke-blackened window openings and absolutely deserted streets. In Kiev I remember stone paving of Kreshchatik and ruins of all, without exception, buildings at the both sides of that the most beautiful in the pre-war street; the blown-up houses in Odessa downtown with undamaged buildings around them as if after the spot bombardment.

The war came to its end, and my childhood together with it. Can I call it happy? Could it be otherwise if it not for my father’s death, if it were not for the war… If, if, if… History and life are known to admit no speculation.

WWII Participants From Our Family

In the Soviet Army ranks and in guerrilla detachments they contributed to the defeat of the German fascism.

Faina Perelrozen (daughter of Elka Maidenberg). Military surgeon, a captain. 1941 through 1944 was at the front-line. Rescued soldiers and officers wounded at the battleields.

Solomon Rozenberg (my father David Rozenberg’s brother). Was a private at the beginning of the war. Was raised to officer during the war. Took part in

numerous battles – from defense of Moscow to capture of Konigsberg (Germany) in 1945. Served in the land and naval units. Retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1960.

Amnon Maidenberg (son of Joseph Maidenberg)- 1944 through 1945 was at the war. Officer of the Red Army.

Aleksey Perov (husband of Dora – Elka Maidenberg's daughter). 1941 through 1945 was at the front-line. A colonel.

Aleksandr Milzman (my late wife Mara Rozenberg /nee Milzman/ father's uncle). 1941 through 1945 was at the front-line. Was in German captivity but escaped. Was a head of a partisan unit that caused great damage to the German fascists. His name and heroic deeds are available through Internet. Aleksandr's large family perished in Odessa in 1941.

Ilya Milzman (my late wife Mara Rozenberg's father). Participated in the 1941 through 1945 hostilities as a private at the beginning and an officer by the end of the war. His parents' large family perished in Odessa in 1941. Remained in military service after the war end. Retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1990 emigrated to Israel with his family.

Golya Maidenberg (son of Goldeh Maidenberg). A private. Killed at the front in 1941.

Those people are no longer alive. But we remember them and are proud that they were among those who rescued the world from fascism; we owe our lives to them.

Holocaust and My Family

Incredible insinuations and hysterical cries are heard today from many political analysts, young interpreters of history, public figures, journalists, and even the not unknown leader of a major Middle Eastern state who overstrain trying to prove that "Holocaust is a lie based upon the unsubstantiated and mythical statements".

That "hyped to the heavens Jewish Holocaust is the global swindle and universal fraud introduced into the mankind conscience".

That "the Holocaust myth stems from the most primitive cheat, is founded on a sick, if not a schizophrenic fantasy, on a put-up job".

And so on, and so forth. One can only wonder and marvel at such a large-scale falsification of history. What motivates the authors of those "researches", what is their ultimate goal? This simple question hardly needs answering.
Few facts from Holocaust history in Odessa substantiated with documents and firsthand testimony:

Year 1941. On October 23 an order was issued demanding all the Jews be present in the Dalnik village within a day. Around 5.000 Jews were gathered on October 24 at the Dalnik outpost support. The first 50 persons were brought to a tank ditch and shot down. To speed up the elimination process the Jews were collected in four barracks with the openings for machine-guns; the floor was saturated with gasoline beforehand. In two barracks people were machine-gunned to death the same day. The next day those in the last two barracks were also shot.

By mid-December about 55.000 of Jews were gathered in Bogdanovka village. December 20, 1941 through January 15, 1942 they all were exterminated by the SS "Einsatzgruppen" firing squad, Romanian soldiers, and Ukrainian policemen. A month later a "death march" for 100.000 Jews into the Golta village three concentration camps was organized.

In January 1942 about 35-40,000 Jews left in Odessa were moved into the ghetto organized on January 10, 1942 in the Slobodka inner-city. The moved out people were packed into the incredible crowding, dwelling was scarce, people had to stay in the open in winter which caused massive mortality. They were gathered into ghetto in order to be deported further on, to the rural concentration camps.

January 12 through February 20, 1942 the 19,582 rest of Jews were deported into Berezovka, Golta, and other concentration camps and ghettoes. They were transported in the unheated cold echelons, many of them died during the journey. On the way the guards used to organize mass shootings. In 18 months the great majority of Jews were dead.

No more than 600 Odessites from those ghettoes survived to see the liberation. Several hundred Jews who were in hiding in Odessa itself have also survived.

The same "conclusive solution to the Jewish issue" took place across the whole Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia as well as in Europe – in Germany, Poland, France, Hungary, the Baltic Sea countries, and many others.

And here is the Holocaust "myth" reflected by my own family history:

Shot to death, perished in ghettoes, martyred in concentration camps, burned alive, foully murdered by German fascists and their accomplices at the occupied during war-time Ukrainian and Moldavian territories:

Native sisters of my father with their families:

-Rozenberg Betty
-Rozenberg Rebecca
-Rozenberg Esfir
-Rozenberg Elizabet

My mother's parents:

-Maidenberg Malken

-Balaban Eliahu (Malken's husband)
My mother's sister
-Balaban Rukhel

From Josef Maidenberg's family:

- 26 nearest kin persons

From my spouse father Milzman's family

- his parents, brothers, sisters – 18 persons altogether

They were not soldiers, all civilians, and were killed only because of their Jewishness.

Their names are included into the Central database of Shoah (Holocaust) victims of the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem (Israel).

Let them be remembered forever!

*Details and firsthand testimonies to the loss of the above people are given in the Appendix to the book.

Note: Mike Maidenberg has not yet [as of June 9, 2014] edited from this point to the end of the memoir. The story and all the facts are not affected, only the flow of the narrative.

The circumstances of Malkeh's murder.

According to the story of Joseph Maidenberg (brother of Molkeh Balaban).
Logged Amnon, son of Joseph.

Malkeh wasn't murdered within the bounds of the ghetto but outside it. This is how it happened:

In one summer morning of 1942 Malkeh and two of her friends disguised as peasant women ventured to go out of the ghetto and to make their way towards Jampol in order to get some of their clothes and other things they had left there in the previous year, and then to change them for some food-stuffs.

But they had scarcely walked a few kilometers away from Dzigovka when several Nazi soldiers on motor-cycles appeared on the crossroad. Catching sight of the women, they stopped and using foul language made them signs to come nearer. The frightened women started scattering, and the Nazis that dashed after them managed to catch only Malkeh and another woman. The third one hid in the deep ditch overgrown with shrubs.

The laughter and the cries of the Nazis "Youdehkaput!" [Jude kaput, finish the Jews] reached her ears, and when she heard the horrific shrieks of their victims, the woman fainted. When some time later she came to herself and climbed out of the ditch she found the dead bodies of her unfortunate companions on the side of the road. their faces were mutilated and blood-stained, their sculls were fractured. The monsters of cruelty spared even two of their bullets to kill the Jewish women and murdered them with the butts of their guns.

When the woman who had survived brought the grievous news to Dzigovka, Elly Balaban tore his hair and sobbed for sorrow without pause. The day before the terrible tragedy took place Elly and my father had forewarned Malkeh about the danger. They implored her to put out of her head her intention of going to Jampol. But unfortunately, she was fated to stand on her ground.

I was told the tragic story by my parents when I met them soon after their liberation from the ghetto in April, 1944. Some months later the Soviet forces drove the Nazi occupants out from Moldavia, too and my military unit was transferred to Kishinev. So my father and the others decided to move to this town.

In the meantime we got to know that no one of our 26 relatives from mother's side had survived. I can't help telling you in what a barbarous and sadistic way some of them were murdered.

In the first days of the Nazi invasion one of my mother's sisters and her large family together with other Jews were driven in to an old synagogue. Then the synagogue was set on fire, and all who were inside burned alive.

The Nazi monsters caught two of my cousins and their wives, tied them one to another with a rope and threw them into a deep lake.

THE POST-WAR SCHOOL YEARS

In June 1945 we came to Chernigov and settled down at my grandmother's sister Elken Maidenberg in a cramped one-bedroom apartment with her husband and their daughters: Faina who returned home after the war with a year-old child and Dora, together with another grandmother's sister Manya Maidenberg with her daughter Lydia Rozenberg*.

Can you imagine that sort of things to-day?! Nine persons lived in two small rooms: adults and children! Lived – what is meant by that word? That means ate, slept, spent their time; ailed and recovered; laughed and shed tears; nursed infants, reared preschool and school-age children; argued and compromised; rejoiced and wondered… lived!

Ukrainian Chernigov is a provincial town bordering both on Russia and Belorussia which can't but have an impact on its whole infrastructure as well as on the language being actually a mix of three languages.

I became a resident of the city known for its rich history and numerous sights. One can come across the artificial medieval mound; cannons from Peter the Great times once meant for guarding the road to Kiev; several dozens of Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries. Beautiful Desna River crosses the city. It is surrounded by a vast multitude of coniferous and deciduous forests, lakes, flood plains.

War has scarred everything. The downtown was almost next to nothing. Brick walls with "No mines" war-time inscriptions were everywhere. Burnt bed frames were seen dangling along with the crashed down staircases.

The city life resembled war time. Military units were always seen to be moving. Of special interest was the sight of girls – traffic-controllers in soldier uniforms who stood at the crossroads with their red signal flags and sent the troop columns to the required direction.

A large military hospital where Faina was the leading surgeon was based in Chernigov. I was an often visitor there due to her, watched movies brought for the wounded, listened to their war tales.

Because of hospital the town was flooded with disabled veterans – legless and armless cripples. There were masses of the shell-shocked ex-servicemen prone to hysteric fits at the markets and other public places which couldn't but scare the surrounding people.

The shops were virtually empty: money could buy nothing except the rationed bread: a pound or a pound and a half for the working people and under pound for the elders and children.

Provisions and clothes had to be a market buy, market being the town's life producer like in any other settlement those days.

The town was invaded by scores of teenagers and homeless, who roamed it aimlessly, and took to stealing or hooliganism. Many of them were armed. Armed robberies and murders were seldom.

Venereal patients annoyed both the population and the city authorities. Venereal diseases are the war inherent attributes. Chernigov had a specialized venereologi clinic. Its patients, whether they have come on their own or were brought forcibly added to the dismal environment.

But notwithstanding all that, little by little everything was coming right, peacetime order was being established.

The residents, us included, were fighting hunger by growing potatoes, the Russian bread number two, at our ogorods*.

Mother has got a job, and all other family members were already working.

Despite my mother and I had a temporary dwelling we found ourselves in a situation difficult from whichever point of view. We were "poor relations" in that awfully overcrowded apartment. No hopes could be cherished for receiving some other lodging. Mother's miserable wages together with absence of any other incomings were responsible for our hard material

While many of my coevals had fathers or received monetary allowance from the state for their fathers lost in the war, however small it was, I was an orphan exciting compassion only in my relatives. I had only mother and them to rely upon.

Following their advice, my mother made a decision over which I was in raptures. By that time the country has initiated specialized military schools. I was sent to such an artillery school to Odessa. I was sixteen then.

Grant-maintained cadets had to wear military uniform, live in military barracks, obey military regulations, and master comprehensive school curriculum – eighth through tenth (senior) grades. After the school they were transferred to the respective military colleges.

By that time my cousin David Rozenberg (Solomon Rozenberg's son) was already a ninth grade student of such a school. Thereto I was sent and accepted to the eighth grade.

On September 1, 1945 I put on the cadet's uniform with shoulder straps and was at the acme of joy.

Traces of war and even military atmosphere were still felt in Odessa. The streets were patrolled by the military. The city was possessed by the aggravated criminal tension.

The population had great problems due to water shortage; houses stood cut of water supply, and very long lines with buckets, pots, and other vessels were seen at the street water hydrants.

Multiple military men added to the city population. Prisoner-of-war columns rattling along the streets on their wooden soles were a habitual sight. They were drawn to work at restoring the destroyed buildings, scavenging, and eliminating the war traces.

The last time I have seen such a column was after the peace treaty with Romania when it declared war on its former ally – Germany. Prisoners-of-war under the Romanian flags were heading to the port and there from – homeward; their war was finished, and Odessa was relieved of another war legacy.

Lodging issue has become more acute. The refugees now returning from evacuation were denied their former apartments by those who stayed there during German-Romanian occupation of Odessa.

Nightly street shooting, special ships hunting sea mines in the coastal zone – all that turned the city back into the war times.

I would like to tell about the event I have witnessed myself but never have come across any reference to it.

Within the harborage a ship has disclosed a sunken submarine which was decided to be dragged to the shallow water, but the tow-line got torn and the boat sank. Its search produced still another submarine.

Both submarines were surfaced. They appeared the Soviet submarines bombarded just at the war outbreak and got sunk in the coastal zone. Thirty eight seamen corpses were found in its watertight compartments. Funeral of the dead involved the whole city and was held at night in order daily work was not stopped and transport was not interfered with. Odessa seems to have no other large-scale event in its whole history as that funeral.

At that time Odessa was a place whereto a new Commander-in-Chief Georgiy Zhukov, the prominent Marshal "punished" by Stalin was sent. He became famous for leading the most large-scale and fierce battles during the World War II: from defense of Moscow and battle of Stalingrad to capture of Berlin. Together with allies' representatives – USA, France, and Great Britain – he was the one to sign the instrument of Germany surrender.

The post-war public opinion had rather Zhukov's generalship than Stalin's symbolic participation responsible for the victory in that war. "The leader"* who gave only himself the credit of all military accomplishments naturally could not digest that and exiled Zhukov to the provincial Odessa.

About all to-day's researchers are unanimous in assigning Zhukov's strategic advancements barely to tremendous and improper human sacrifice for the sake of obtaining advantages at the war fronts. No one is supposed to challenge that attitude to-day. I take the liberty to assume that it was just that unimaginable human sacrifice that has brought victory over fascism. In all probability, no other choice was available for the maimed by the merciless Stalin's totalitarian regime country – the Soviet Union as it was then. And what could be another solution? To let the country and its people be tormented by Hitler?

Or better abide the allies to help? By the way, they did helped – with their provisions, technical equipment, arms, even with the Second Front opening – but it was not those things that affected the war outcome. My generation knows and remembers that it was due to the multinational country formerly called the Soviet Union and after its collapse – Russia, to its soldiers innumerably lost in the war fronts, to its people who underwent the greatest hardships, that the fascism was utterly routed.

I believe that the War survivors will remember Zhukov as an outstanding commander who has contributed invaluably to the victory over fascism.

I have seen him twice within a short period of time. The first instance was when together with other cadets I was sent to repair Zhukov's house in Arcadia, the most prestigious Odessa city district.

After we were through with the garden, orchard, and outbuildings a hearty lunch (as for those hungry days) was laid for us where we met Zhukov himself. One can imagine how the sixteen-seventeen year old teenagers admired him!

For the second time I have seen him on the tribune when we, the future officers, participated in the 1946 military parade dedicated to another anniversary of the November 7th Socialist Revolution.

At that specialized school I entered the Soviet Union Young Communist League – komsomol for short. Nobody obliged me, or threatened, or forced. The entire class without exceptions wrote identical applications, and we were admitted. It was a trivial routine in the lives of young people - schoolchildren, cadets, students – those days. It ran current; nobody puzzled themselves over the ideological principles of that organization and its like. Nobody was indignant with "personal violence" as several decades later it was put and even condemned by its most active members. No comments on my side, no blames, no excuses. It is really lamentable to be one of the "lost and fooled" generation as history puts it.

As to the specialized school itself where I spent several months – well, it was a bitter disappointment. Its first years at least were not answerable to the expectations of the entrants.

Leaving aside empty building and rooms with desks there was nothing else there. Material and household resources were absent. Neither furniture, nor elementary equipment, or crockery.

We used to enter the mess-room furnished with long tables (seating 10 persons each) bearing two pots of food and three-four cans (instead of plates). The cadets were lined up along the wall and after the command "Sit!" (without chairs – where to sit?) rushed to the tables and snatching out "the plates" (their number was insufficient, and spoons were carried along in the pockets), scuffled and swore. That was succeeded by a "Stop!" command, and as a sort of punishment – two-hour marching in a parade-ground. The cadets were often and causelessly punished by extra out-of-curriculum and hard works: latrines cleaning, yard tidying up, etc. With nothing left to be done, our commanding officers devised an "original" punishment: to dig absolutely useless holes at the neighboring wasteland that further on were to be covered up.

Management of the school used the cadets for different services. Thus, the head of that military school, Colonel Romanov, used to wander around the city in a landau pulled by two horses with a cadet boy on leave from the lessons as a coachman.

The basic contingent were "war children" – orphans, waifs and strays, and "regiment sons", i.e. boys so to say adopted by the military and even front-line units or partisan detachments. Many of them had military awards. It was just them who were appointed the commanders of the cadet groups.

"Sissies" sent to school by their parents were sure to enjoy their "special" favors. Assault and battery were prospering, as well as bullying by basically the same boys as we were, but their severe war life experience substantiated their feeling of permissiveness.

But it was not those things that mattered. After all, we also have had rather hardscrabble lives. The most intolerable for me was the fact that due to the lack of places in military barracks the Odessites, and their relatives could live at home (no doubt it was deemed temporary).

Together with my cousin David, a year older than me, we lived at my aunt Rosalie's (the sole survived sister of my father) in anticipation of being placed into the military barrack. But when the delay appeared too protracted the Rosalie Vyazovsky family grew restless, and in that way my "military education" came to its end.

It all resulted in my leaving Odessa for Chernigov.

Still David was lucky to obtain a place in military barracks and after leaving school was admitted to a military college which defined his whole future life and career.

In Chernigov I proceeded my studies at a men's high school. For some reason (perhaps again following "the great leader's" instructions) separate education was involved those years similar to the pre-Revolution grammar schools.

We still lived with my mother in the same apartment which has become less crowded: Manya with Lydia went to Solomon who was transferred after the war from Germany to bear arms in Belorussia.

On my first winter holidays I made for the environs of Bobruisk to my uncle Solomon. It was a difficult trip with several transfers. Passenger train contained only carriages with numbered reserved seats. Scandaling and fighting human crowd was tightly packed, and many were left standing. Multitudes of people were waiting at the stations, all of them heading somewhere, with military ones prevailing. Both soldiers and officers on their way back from Germany and Western countries liberated from Nazi occupation – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania – were loaded with "trophies" or, to put it bluntly, suitcases stuffed with miscellaneous luggage: clothes, watches, footwear, different household items obscure in the Soviet Union.

That accompanying luggage was hunted by a numerous army of big thieves and pilferers. It was a Russian tradition: "Peel the pillage!" Closely connected to it is a postal railway office issue. Soviet soldiers who occupied the German towns were allowed to send parcels to their homes which was realized with a great deal of enthusiasm: tens thousands of parcels filled the storage facilities and mail-cars. Personnel of storage places together with their friends were prompt in extracting the contents and substituting it for something much less valuable, sand or bricks for example. That was a sort of "privatization" specific for those days.

In a passenger car corridor, at a freight-car platform, sometimes on the car roof (that sort of travelling was also in existence), in a troop train once – I have reached Bobruisk at last. I was met by a soldier in a landrover and taken to the village quarters of the military unit commanded by my uncle Solomon, then a Captain.

Why in landrover? The village stood in the very thick of the Belorussia woods with both highway and railway dozens of kilometers far off. Winters in fact isolated it, telephone was unavailable. The single landrover once a week beat its way through impassible roads wallowing in deep snow to get bread and mail to the military unit.

The above inconveniences did not hinder soldiers and officers arrived from Germany in settling down rather comfortably. The trucks in the possession of that military unit have transported abundant "trophies" from Germany. A commander of the unit, Solomon for example had privileges and transport which he used to take out from Germany a maximum of possible: furniture, piano, clothes, household utensils, pictures, bicycle, and other property.

The officers were quartered at the peasants' households, and besides lodging availed themselves of the owners' vegetables and – which was above all – samogon (homemade vodka). Solomon's family was served by a batman, and they lived "in paradise on earth".

Another curious fact: the military unit has brought a group of captured Germans to the village, and they had to share that isolated life with all. That environment furthered the Germans' transfer from enemies into the attendants to the victors.

Many of the Germans had civil professions: tailors, shoemakers, cooks, and the like. A German tailor has made over a German officer's overcoat for me which I wore two or three years afterwards.

Until to-day I remember Russian rustic bath where scalding steam made one leap out into the terrible frost and fall into snow; trips to the woods in a sleigh pulled by a swift-footed horse.

After holidays were over I arrived home, once again using passing trains.

I have spent summer holidays at Solomon's cantonments two times more. The last one was in 1947 in Slutsk.

In that period I have seen many interesting things related to the past war and preserved in the Belorussia woods: put out of action tanks (both Soviet and German), abandoned guns, partisan bunkers, and even scattered shells and other ammunition which I and David who also used to come on holidays carefully avoided.

We provided ourselves with guns which we took pains to conceal from the adult eyes, but while in the woods we used to fire at different targets fancying we were real warriors.

In summer 1947 a large Rozenberg company has gathered in Slutsk: David and Mark along with Lyudmila Vyazovsky (Rosalie Rozenberg's children). We were happy-go-lucky, with nothing lacking, though it were hungry years.

I remember parcels with unimaginable foods delivered to the Soviet Union from America according to 1947 Lend-Lease Act.

Solomon who was ranked up to major by that time headed the military construction unit. He helped me join that team as a civilian and I started working for wages as a rate-setter.

While in Slutsk I got into a curious life-menacing incident. One night I awoke to feel loss of consciousness due to explosion just above my head. It sounded like a loud clap or burst balloon. My face got heated at once. Electricity was shut down. A rainy storm was rustling outside. As it became clear afterwards, it was the exploded ball lightning that had penetrated through an open window. The experts assured me later that it was a miraculous survival.

It was only three years on the whole that I spent in Chernigov but in my further life that above-the-river city was remembered as my youth city, my school years city, the city where we knew that "happiness is waiting ahead"; when essential was "to hope and wait" because "all dreams come true, my dear comrade, if wish is strong and if you wish" (lines from the popular Soviet songs).

That sort of optimism predominated over the post-war devastation and hunger of our surroundings.

Schooling went on; we had excellent single-hearted teachers many of whom I still remember to-day. From time to time we had evening party with dancing. For that occasion girls from the neighboring women's school were invited.

A theater group was organized directed by an elderly Moscow theater former actor who managed to install love to that kind of art into us. It was due to him that some of our school graduates have chosen theater for profession.

Among the events of those days the trial of German generals brought before the bar for war crimes stands apart. The proceedings lasted for several weeks in the single movie theater.

It attracted a lot of people at first, but as time went their interest got exhausted and the court-room was almost empty.

We used that place for warming ourselves and spending time when we shirked school. The court atmosphere was boring: with sentence forejudged, the accusers and judges were obviously temporizing; witnesses mumbled something unintelligible; speeches of the assigned defenders showed their fear to overstep the permitted limits; and the accused kept skeptical eyes anticipating the impending sentence.

In 1945-1947 the same processes took place in different cities formerly invaded by Nazis during the war. In Ukraine, Belorussia, Baltic States, Moldavia, Russia – in Riga, Minsk, Bobruisk, Krasnodar, and many others. The USSR Supreme Soviet (Soviet parliament) has issued a decree on sending to the gallows German war criminals and parricides.

The decree was applied to all such sentences. The death penalties were usually carried into effect at the cities central squares before the abundance of people at nights, and sometimes even at daytime.

I have witnessed the like execution in Bobruisk (Belorussia).

It was a dreadful spectacle. It took place at daytime. The great body of people flooded the square. A truck drove up to the installed gibbet with several loops; the convicts were standing in the truck basket supported by the guards. The tailgate was opened, the guards threw the loops over the convict necks, and the truck drew off leaving the hanging convulsed people. For some time the spectators were benumbed, but then the most inconceivable thing happened – in some places the applause was heard.

It seems to me that normal observers of that sight would never express their emotions in that way. Those who applauded the execution in all probability must have been the ones who only yesterday applauded (or took part in) the likewise partisan executions.

School was bumming along. The lessons were supplemented with various domestic everyday chores.

Firewood had to be stored up for winter. A truck was allocated for transporting it but the whole work was done ourselves: going to the woods; cutting down the trees and sawing them up into short logs; loading and unloading; cutting firewood – habitual things for us.

Planting, tillaging, harvesting potatoes and digging pits in the yard for storing it until spring – such was a humdrum life those years.

I moonlighted trying my best to contribute to our survival. The city with rich ancient history was often visited by archeologists, and my friends and I used to be hired for manual labor at excavations.

Not only that work was generously paid, it was also interesting: we often found burial places, warlike armor, and household items belonging to the ancient centuries-old antiquity.

In response to a call of the local authorities we went several times to the Desna riverside within the city limits to plant young trees. The participants were given a flour package each which was pat enough.

The boys like me were rather skeptical as to the results of our work because we did believe those plants would soon either wither away, or be eaten by animals, or trampled down.

And it was much to my great surprise when visiting Chernigov 20 years since to see those green groves covering the Desna riverside turned into beautiful parks with tall splendid trees.

It might be over-sentimental but I can’t but mention my delight at the thought that those groves contain the trees grown from the saplings planted by me.

Such was my way of fulfilling one of the man's biblical duties: "plant a tree…" (another two – "build a house" and "bear a son" were put into effect much later).

We also used to divert ourselves from work and lessons: strolled aimlessly; organized school parties; celebrated happy holidays; roamed the surrounding forests; made friends; played soccer; went skiing in winter; spent leisure time at Desna riverside, at the lakes; swam, dived, fished… the list is about endless.

Little by little alcohol was entering our lives (even to-day I loathe that smell and taste of samogon (beet-root or potatoes self-made hard alcohol drink, a sort of tub whiskey – no other alcohol was available those years); we were getting involved into hard smoking of which abuse I can't get out even now.

And sure we were courting girls, falling in love gingerly, guardedly, though fondly, in a childlike manner: embraces and kisses were the wildest dreams which was quite explainable: sexual revolution was still far ahead.

A curious episode: when I was visiting Spain just in our times I got acquainted to a rather elderly man who had once joked that he pitied himself for being born too early to take part in sexual revolution. It was just the same with our generation. But the present-day Russian youth takes that time like "no sex in the USSR" as one of the TV show participants has uttered accidently once.

Meanwhile Chernigov was gradually adapting itself to peaceful life: electricity was restored (only kerosene lamps were used until then), water supply was renewed, ruins were cleared away, and piles of garbage were removed.

Similar to many towns of the post-war Ukraine Chernigov had a camp for German prisoners-of-war who were drawn to restoring the city. The camp was guarded by a barbed wire, and we often were roaming around it in order to change potatoes for German soldier belt-buckles, lighters, badges, and the like.

By the way, the belt-buckles had a "Gott mit uns" (God with us) inscription in large letters. The fascist assassins and monsters of cruelty must have also taken God Almighty for their ally! I am stunned speechless and can't comment.

We were not unaware of the Western Ukraine war: from time to time burials of militiamen sent there on a mission to fight both the Bandera* and OUN* men took place, as well as of specialists – teachers, doctors, journalists sent there to work and coming back in the sealed coffins.

In that way those now respected and honored bandits and killers were "fighting" as if with Stalin, exterminating in passing absolutely innocent people, including their like from the Eastern areas.

Theater was revived; popular was a folk choir which started each and every concert with a song dedicated to Stalin.

But the most awesome was cinema; we took pains not to miss a movie, especially American ones with charming Dina Durbin. And "My Dream Girl" German film which was shown with cut out parts considered pernicious for Soviet people has generated considerable public excitement which was stamped "unhealthy" in Soviet newspapers; the movie was soon withdrawn from distribution as though "according to the spectators' requests" who allegedly had addressed the respective offices declaring "that dream girl" to be "not the girl of our dreams because we need films praising labor feat of Soviet women".

Each movie show was forestalled with a “Daily News” news-reel comprised of episodes featuring “happy”* life of Soviet people opposed to the “tainted West” mode of life.
What is most curious – Communist Party and government leaders appearing on the screen: Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Beriya, and other “chieftains” inevitably caused a storm of applause.
It went on in darkness, people did not see each other, nobody forced them to clap, but nevertheless that tradition installed into the consciousness of people was observed throughout the country still many years after Stalin’s death.

There is no way to explain that blind faith of those days, that conviction of appropriateness of what was going on around, and was not apt to be discussed or condemned.
Nowadays I can only wonder and be amazed by that fact, even be ashamed, but recollecting those years I am not afraid to confess and will not repent of what I believed in, of trying to be society-useful by participating in all activities for the benefit of that society.

I had faith as many around me, and that faith made me blind, as well as the others, and I never reflected on the dreadful events in the country. I knew neither about the mass character of Stalin’s repressions nor about the unimaginably numerous Siberian camps. And who could know?

But still we were confronted by “strange” events. I leave aside the revealed and arrested persons who collaborated with the Nazis and served as policemen during German occupation: they really deserved to be punished.

Quite of a sudden our Ukrainian language teacher disappeared; as it became known later he was convicted of “distribution of nationalist views” at school (and as to us, his lessons never hinted to that). German language teacher was also arrested: he was of German origin.

During my Chernigov school years the most horrible campaign initiated by the “great leader” was started and led through several years – struggle against cosmopolitism.

I attended the all-city “secret” meeting of communists and komsomol (Young Communist League) members where a letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) was read without the right to disclose its contents. We were let into a “criminal” event: two Soviet scientists, Professors Kluyeva and Raskin, while attending scientific symposium in the USA have published in American scientific magazine the results of their cancer investigations. After they returned home their “treacherous behavior” was examined by a special committee headed by Stalin himself. That seemingly negligible fact has initiated the whole artificially generated wave that has set Soviet ideological trend in all spheres of life in the country – in politics, history, culture, art, literature.

I will not render the facts and events I have witnessed. They have become history. Desire to please, fear of being fired or, which is worse, arrested made the officials, art and science figures, respected writers think out and lay open to the public absolutely impossible things, sometimes bordering on idiotism.

The history text-books were rewritten; literary works castigating “cosmopolitism” were created. Foreign terms were substituted for Russian ones. Physical, chemical, mathematical laws were renamed.

Accomplishments of the scholars – Edison, Boyle, Marriot, Gay-Lussac, and others who have inscribed their names into science were negated and awarded to Russian scientists.

I remember how much later, at the marine college, the foreign ship flags on the wall charts were painted over and substituted for red ones. The unique nautical navigation instruments of English produce had brass plates with English inscriptions pincered out.

After graduation I started working at the design office; technical documents had to be russified, i.e. nautical terms of English origin were to become Russian. In accordance with hastily devised "guide lines" those terms have acquired a far-fetched and even comic character: hundreds of terms were russified most absurdly.

Personally initiated by "the grandest in the mankind's history of all centuries and peoples wise leader great Stalin" the whole science and technology fields were extirpated and anathematized as erratic and untrue despite they were acknowledged by other countries – genetics, cybernetics, modern biology, and others.

Moreover, famous scientists and engineers who "tried to drag into life deleterious for Soviet people views and trends" were persecuted and often repressed.

And how enthusiastic were magazines and newspapers about the "wisdom of great Stalin"; how pathetic were the opponents of the "disclosed" theories who spoke at the numerous congresses and meetings; what fierce rave was shown by those "wayward ones" who repented of their errors!

"Rootless cosmopolitans" were also hold up to shame – poets and writers: sealed to pillory were the magazines with "foreign to Soviet citizens" published works. Anathemized were many Soviet poets and writers.

And what was the reaction of average Communists, Young Communist Leaguers, workers and peasants, working intellectuals according to official (with non-existent other) press? Of course, "tremendous ovation approved the right decisions of Party and government", although privately, anxiously looking around, people giggled and mocked, quite undemonstrative in their indignation.

What is most important, the so-called "struggle with cosmopolitism" had in its trail aggravation of human relations, hostility, conflicts, police information, concepts of good and evil, morality and ethics change.

One of the "struggle with cosmopolitism" consequences was aggravation of the state anti-Semitism. Its peak was reached by the end of 1952 when Kremlin doctors of Jewish nationality were declared "killers, foreign intelligence and international Zionism agents".

It was due to Stalin's death that Soviet Jews have escaped mass repressions.

One of 1948 important events was a currency reform with simultaneous derationing. Previous banknotes were substituted for new ones. New ruble was made worth ten previous ones, with limited overall exchange sum, as well as time - only three days: you are late – you're to lose. For those who received only wages (like my mother) the reform was of no significance. But those who have amassed money (they were numerous during the war) that was a tragic event – nowadays it would be called "default" of a sort.

For common people, for my mother and me derationing meant end of hunger, need, and possibility of acquiring the necessary quantities of food and eating our fill at last. And the authorities should be given their due: produce of every kind and in sufficient quantity was available in the shops. Life became easier.

IT TAKES LONG TO APPROACH THE SEA

1948 was my last school year; I received a certificate of graduation. And at once, I was confronted by a question: what comes next?

While in the sun-burnt Uzbek steppe evacuation I was wondering what the sea was like; I longed to see it one day. Those seemingly unrealizable then dreams might have generated my after-school decision to link my future life with the sea.

Driven by a pure youthful ardor and inexhaustible optimism I decided to give myself up to the most virile occupation – seafaring; to become an ocean-going navigator; thus I left Chernigov for Odessa Maritime Academy. I couldn't even imagine that my venture was doomed to fail: it was a time of aggravated institutionalized anti-Semitism which has achieved its peak in several years when charges were cooked up against the "killer doctors".

Witnesses of the 1953 events aver quite positively that Odessa with its highest percentage of Jewish population had trains waiting at the railway station to take all Jews without exceptions to Siberia, to the so-called Jewish Autonomous Republic – Birobijan.

I doubt the fact but that version exists.

This notwithstanding, I easily got the pass mark at the entrance exams and was rejoicing over my victory trying on a beautiful marine uniform in my dreams.

But the other day I was summoned to the office where my documents were suggested to be withdrawn because I was not given a clearance by selection committee. I was shocked by that flagrant injustice and could not believe my ears! Inquiries, complaints, requests – all was vain. Later I got to know that at least in 1948 and the succeeding years the Jews were not allowed to the Maritime Academy: the improper 5th point* was decisive; and to be accepted to some other higher educational institution you had to hit the secretly administered limited percentage of Jews which was rigorously observed.

That failure made me become a second year student of the Maritime College shipbuilding department, with no seafaring prospects. My longing for sea was still alive!

To some extent my youthful conceit was however satisfied: I wore the marine uniform all the same. In that way my "seafarers family" affiliation was started.

That Maritime College is named to-day after Alexander Marinesco, the famous World War II submarine captain who was lucky to exterminate a German transport ship carrying German submarine crews. He was a pre-war graduate of our College which has rich history being established as long ago as in pre-Revolution times under the tsarist regime.

The students' education and regimen fit those of the naval colleges although we belonged to the civil office – Ministry of Merchant Marine. We were clad in marine uniform and lived in naval depot.

The commander of the department was a naval officer. The College was headed by a captain; deputy director was a coastguard general; naval subjects were taught by marine officers.

The students' life was exceedingly paramilitary. In two years the College was made navy and subordinated to the Ministry of Defense.

We got accustomed to that mode of life; we were fully secured, with no problems common for the civil students (food, clothes, and low scholarships). When allowed a pass outside the College we were seeking only entertainments and pleasures.

The students were composed both of yesterday's school-pupils and former war ex-servicemen. It was not until my life here in America that I started making inquires as to the fates of my former classmates: we were all scattered around the world. Most of them are no more.

While at College I was going in for sports, men's ones: boxing and wrestling.

The most successful was my 1950-51 passion for a parachute sport. After theoretical training we made parachute jumps from the ordinary double-winged biplane. Following the pilot-instructor command from the rear cabin we had to leave the front cabin for the lower wing of the plane burdened with two parachutes – the main and the emergency one – and jump.

I will not deny that initial jumps inspired an overwhelming sense of dread in me; I was scared by that unavoidable step, as if to step into an abyss. But what a bliss and happiness it was after the parachute was opened! To soar bird-like in the skies with breast burst open by the sense of joy that I managed to do it! The program included night jumps, sea jumps, armed jumps. I made twenty five jumps, was given a certificate and a badge.

My reminiscences would be incomplete if I omit relations with girls.

Some flames were seen but no serious fire.

In my third year at the College I met Alla K., whom I guess I can name my first love. I became acquainted with her at her friend's apartment whereto I accompanied a pal of mine. We made friends, and soon our regular meetings turned into a sincere youthful love. We used to go to the cinema, theater, parties together; developed a taste for music. Alla was a pretty wide-eyed typical Russian girl. Her two long waist-low dark-blond braids attracted attention. I was extremely proud noticing envious glances of young people when I was pacing along the Deribasovskaya Street – the Odessa central downtown street – with such a beauty arm in arm.

We ardently fall in love with each other but our relations were no more than embraces and kisses – in the park, in dark passageways and other available places. I could not hurt Alla's pure feelings by demanding something extra.

Alla was finishing her last school year then.

Her father – a colonel – was a naval major of Odessa. In a little while he was transferred to Nikolayev and he moved with his whole family. But it did not impede our relations. Despite being parted we kept on loving each other still stronger sending letters and photos almost every day.

From time to time I visited Nikolayev getting there in the passing truck bodies, frozen and uncomfortable. I endured those four-hour inconveniences bravely for the sake of even very short meeting with Alla. She was a Pedagogical University student by that time.

The last time I have seen her was on the 1951 New Year eve before going to naval practical training.

We never met since then although our correspondence was not interrupted; we were naïve to fancy everything to be ahead. But little by little correspondence died out and our romantic youthful love affair came to its end.

But that one in heavens who manages relations of all earthlings must have been against that "impropriety" and decided to bring that "love story" to its logic end.

It happened as follows. In summer of 1958 I came to Nikolayev from Baku on a business trip and decided to spend my rest-day at the riverside beach.

Having swam to my heart's content I was about to get out of water when suddenly caught sight of Alla who recognized me and was about to plunge into the water just in her dress. I rushed to her. We were so shocked by that meeting that could not utter a word at first.

She invited me to her place and I came with a bottle of wine and a bouquet.

I was married by that time. Alla was also married for several years and had a four or five year old daughter.

It so happened that her husband (a military pilot) was away just then.

We sat up late until wee hours recollecting the past and could not stop talking. Alla put her daughter to bed…

…Parting at dawn at her threshold we shamefully hided our eyes feeling awkward. It must have been the feeling of our sinful and improper behavior (regarding our spouses perhaps). We never met since then and knew nothing about each other.

College studies went on as usual. Lessons, practical training – naval alternated with seafaring, and industrial - filled our lives.

We were trained in seafaring at the "Ivan Susanin" olden passenger ship that used to be tsar's family property and now she belonged to our College. We served as stokers during that Black Sea strictly coastwise navigation.

My first naval practice took place at the cruiser, another one – at the submarine secret naval base in Balaklava (near Sevastopol).

We stayed in Balaklava six or seven months after graduating from the College. It was here that I received the submariner naval profession, was adjured, and ranked lieutenant of the navy.

Running ahead I would like to note that being placed in reserve I was assigned to a military service place – a certain submarine. Every two or three years I was trained there and at last was ranked as high as lieutenant commander of the navy.

All that time I was an external student of the Odessa Maritime University ship-building department. Later, while working in Baku, I used to come annually to Odessa for exams.

To work and study at the same time was rather an ordeal, leaving aside different life circumstances that involved prolonged intervals in studies. It was not until the Maritime University evening department was opened in Baku that I managed to graduate from the University at last in 1967 with a higher education diploma.

In June 1951 we returned to Odessa to undergo postgraduate distribution to the naval objects serving civil purposes. And, in that instant... carefree life came to its end.

It was a ripe time to start building a "radiant future", and 40 years yet had to be lived through before moving to America for permanent residency. Whether these were serene years I can judge only to-day. As if testing me for durability, my fate used to present unexpected surprises leaving me at the life's crossroads forced to start all over again, to master new professions, to change positions, places of work and residence, to recover from losing the dearest and nearest.

As I excelled in my College and not without protection of my influential relatives I could opt for the place of work and residence; so I went to Moscow.

I was lucky to get fixed up in a job at a marine R&D organization very soon. But I was confronted by the acute issue of living facilities lack. I was a temporal guest of the Colonel Aleksey Perov's family (a husband of Dora – Elken Maidenberg's daughter). With his wife and

two little daughters they occupied a small apartment in the Moscow suburban cantonment (Aleksey was a lecturer at the Military Academy). I was forestalled at my work that dwelling would not be available in the nearest future.
And just then a word came from Baku where our College graduate had already received a municipal lodging.

A thought of my mother left to the mercy of fate in Chernigov never escaped me. While in Moscow I could rely on the bed in a dormitory at the best but it would not meet the challenge. I was unable to take my mother with me.

It is not seldom that a seemingly negligible and accidental event can govern the succeeding life pattern. At one's life crossroads wherefrom dozens of possible roads start, my fate has predestined the sole one which I have chosen myself. And nobody will ever answer whether that hasty choice was uniquely correct.

Hoping to receive lodgings and have my mother with me I did not hesitate to apply for a Baku position to the Marine Ministry; that must have played a fatal role, and my life has chosen another direction starting from the Moscow crossroads.

The standard of living in Moscow was always immeasurably above other cities in the country, leaving aside culture, material security, household conveniences, and the availability of diverse entertainment enterprises. Moscow is the capital of the country, it was patriotically berhymed and sang of, its citizens were proud to be Muscovites.

To move to Moscow for permanent residency was absolutely out of question for the non-residents. It was only specific enterprising individuals that could manage that involving prolonged and complex machinations.

No sooner I had entered the train from Moscow that I realized that might have made a false step, but nothing could be changed. And all the oncoming years I could not forgive myself for that ill-conceived and hasty decision. Moreover so that I did not receive lodgings in Baku either: that was a problem without solution as elsewhere in the country (it was by mere chance that my former classmate who had arrived there before me received a room in a municipal apartment).

I was only twenty two those years, having nobody wiser and more experienced at my side to advise me rightly.

Just in the first months of my stay in Baku, I rented a more or less decent room and brought my mother. I had to do it, otherwise all my sacrifice and losses described above would be vain. I could not leave my mother a "poor relative" in Chernigov any longer.

Sometimes I ponder on wisdom of adhering to the above life position those years: I might have been attending to my own self, to my own future without binding myself with mother-caring and being more free at the start of my life to box cleverly. But no, whispers my conscience, I have done right, and what is done – done.

THE SUN OF BAKU: WHITE AND BLACK

What could I know about Baku except for it being a sufficiently large Caspian Seafront city, a capital of Azerbaijan, and an oil-producing center? Only school geography information.

While in my war-time childhood I have discovered Central Asia – Uzbekistan, now I had to discover unfamiliar Caucasus as a grown-up.

I intended to stay there as little as possible and make my best to escape at my earliest convenience. But I appeared to be a naïve optimist.

Once I have come across an appealing joke: "If you wish to set God laughing – let him know what you plan". The best words I've ever heard!

It all wound up in my sixteen-year stay in Baku – 1952 through 1968 –the core of my life. These were years of my skill growth; successes and failures; happiness and grief; making both friends and enemies; delights and disappointments; losses and finds; vain hopes and tragic events.

Baku is an extremely picturesque city resembling Naples by its huge horseshoe-shaped bay wherefrom its benched galleries are developed high up. It is a giant industrial center with numerous plants and multi-purpose enterprises operating within and outside the city limits. Whole industries were initiated owing to foreign concessions as far back as the tsarist Russian Empire.

Being the Azerbaijan center officially and actually, Baku's population was originally international, unlike other national republics (e.g. Tbilisi in Georgia, Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Yerevan in Armenia, etc.).

The Azerbaijan natives, Russian-speaking people (Jews included), and – I stress the fact – Armenians. While the Azerbaijans were quite tolerant to the Russian-speaking population, the significant percentage of the Armenians suffered from the covered animosity stemming from as far back as pre-Revolution times.

The 80s of the previous (20th) century were specific for a wild slaughter and pogroms of the Armenian population due to the fact that Communist Party officials together with administrative bodies preferred to ignore that pathological enmity.

Completing my short description of Baku I cannot but mention its rather heavy climate. Trying summer swelter; recurring North winds sweeping away everything in their path and literally knocking one out; shortage of fresh water; scarce greenery – unavoidable partners of people residing there.

Caspian Sea is a huge basin of paramount significance for Baku-Astrakhan-Krasnovodsk inland ports shipping lines, as well as Baku-Iran outland one. Of utmost importance always was tanker fleet, outdated and absolutely unfit for transporting oil during those post-war years from Baku to the Central Russia.

The sea is exceptionally stormy. Regular storms are the worst bugbears for seafarers. It is rich in rare fish – renowned beluga sturgeon, soft caviar bearer.

And above all its inexhaustible stores of high-quality oil.

I got a job in a shipbuilding design organization. We had to design new ships and reconstruct olden and worn out fleet. I started making jack at once due to progressive wages.

When both situation and labor legislation were soon understood I realized Baku would be my home for several years at least. And it was not due to the required three years of work after the College distribution. Even with that term over, signing off, moving, and getting another job were almost unrealizable.

Those years Soviet people were legally put to slave labor tethering one to a single enterprise, organization, collective farm, and residence place.

Any violation of labor discipline was chastised. To be over 20 minutes late for work entailed court examination involving the corresponding law clause and cruel punishment up to deprivation of liberty.

A person on the move to another city would confront enormous odds.

The perennial problem of people during all years under Soviet ruling was housing habitation which was provided through one's job after a long-term work experience. People could be kept on waiting lists for decades, and often were retired without receiving the municipal apartment. You could not buy lodgings. The received apartment (a room) was considered rented from the state, and the tenant had to pay only household running costs. The apartments were mostly the so-called "communes", where each room was often mutually occupied by two or three generations of a family.

My line of work required prolonged marine voyages to observe, test, and fulfill everything that constituted the ship expert profile.

Hard times were not seldom, particularly at the tankers in stormy weather when waves were crashing over the deck; the vessel was jolted by turbulence like an eggshell; it was impossible to keep balance. But one had to use calm periods for work.

I liked my work. More so that those regular marine voyages, as well as missions to the Caspian seafront towns interspersed my life. I have repeatedly visited Krasnovodsk, Astrakhan, Makhachkala, and the Black Sea ports.

Soon some housing prospects appeared: a house was started where we, four young specialists from Odessa, were promised apartments.

A building lot was provided, barbed-wired, sentry-posted, and construction works started.

In all development works those times the convicts were involved: such was Stalin's reality, and sad as it was, people, especially those who had no convicted relatives, were quite indifferent to the fact.

In about three years my mother and I received a 150 sq. ft. room in a four-room apartment with every room occupied by another family – of my three colleagues who were already married by that time. A regular Soviet communal apartment was formed: one rest-room, one bath-room, and a small kitchen.

We all were happy and did not grumble. Brawls, women's (as well as men's) showdowns, all "joys" of such life appeared later. But what could we do – that was our "the very best in the world" Soviet mode of living.

My design office consisted of several marine departments. There still was another one called "special" whose function was unknown. Its staff, the designers like us, hold their tongues. Only authorized personnel were admitted to it.

At the beginning of 1953 I was summoned to director. In his office I met two absolutely strange men in civvies. One of them presented himself by a red identity certificate of which I managed to note only the KGB (Committee for State Security) symbol. That invitation could mean nothing but bad news for common people. I was the one, and to be strict got scared: denunciation, anti-Soviet anecdote, "improper" political talks – all things that could herald the forthcoming serious trouble, being arrested included, flashed through my head that minute.

Having feasted their eyes upon my scared face, the "secret agents" as they used to call themselves, announced that after examination of my personal file they found me credible and

suitable for working out a “top secret” engineering documentation; they received my nondisclosure agreement: the rejected offer could bring about the undesirable consequences for me.

In several days I was already at work in the secret department behind the iron grid and iron door. We were designing special military devices for the civil marine. It included artillery, anti-aircraft, mine-torpedo, and the like equipment to be installed at the civil ships in case of war. We designed special constructions for the weapon systems mounting that were manufactured at the shipyards. Thousands tons of those peace-time constructions were idling in the vast secret stores in expectation of a war.

And just for the time being the equipment that had to be tested was installed at the ships; the crews were man-of-war’s men; testing and practice shootings were held in the high seas. I happened to participate in those experiments.

What was the reason for such a thorough description of that “secret” but in fact negligibly interesting fragment of my Baku life? Abundant people in the former Soviet Union with its tendency for blacking out everything were involved in that kind of work. Never and nowhere – whether it were questionnaires or legal papers (for emigration purposes in particular – I would be denied exit permit) had I mentioned that fact later on.

Imagine my surprise 40 (!) years after, here in America, in a small Californian borough when after the premonitory call I was visited by a fluent speaker of Russian (still in civvies again). He presented himself as a CIA officer and asked to describe… my work at that shipbuilding design company special department of which fact THEY were aware. After hearing me out we parted, with him concluding that my information was outdated and of no value. Isn’t it amazing? To fish out an obscure (and not the single one I guess) probable “bearer of secrets” from the hundreds of thousands “Russian” immigrants in order to obtain some useful information, little as it may appear!

Well done, guys! You justly make your bread and spend the tax-payers’ money!

I cannot describe my Baku life without mentioning, if only in passing, some crucial events in the life of the country, those ones that are still on my memory.

March 5, 1953 is the date of Stalin’s death. His death caused shock and unutterable confusion among the country’s people, particularly in the Caucasus republics.

The Caucasus (wherefrom Stalin originated) inhabitants seemed to be more emotional in their apprehension of the latter-day God loss than other people.

I tell only about what was going on in my neighborhood, among my own people. My memory still clings to the state that people were overwhelmed with and which could be rendered by one word – bewilderment. What next; is it possible to live without Stalin at all; what will happen to us; who will take care of us; who will protect; how to live without faith?

For several days the funeral atmosphere was being forced; life has come to a halt.

The events have achieved their peak by the farewell minute. All employees of our organization were gathered in the central hall where radio-set was installed and listened silently to the Moscow broadcast (TV was unavailable those days yet).

And when the tragic voice of the presenter accompanied by a mournful music declared it was high time to bid farewell, a literal black-out occurred. These must be things akin to what was specific for the shamanic, or parapsychologic, or extrasensoric, or wizardic impact during religious rites in ancient times.

I was curious what was going on outside and went out into the street. The city enterprises stopped working, factory whistles were buzzing, as well as ships at the piers. Traffic was stopped, thousands of cars were blowing their horns, sobbing was heard from all sides.

The procedure over, our employees started for their jobsites hiding their tear-filled eyes from each other. Immersion into Nirvana was over.

But according to instructions from above mourning was prolongated for extra several days: people in columns were moving towards the Stalin museum (he was known to start his revolutionary activities in Baku) to place wreaths. Thousands of wreaths comprised high piles both inside and outside the museum.

But that was not the end of the Stalin's period in people's life. Soon the after-Stalin leader Khrushchev has disclosed Stalin's crimes.

The bloody Laurentiy Beria, the KGB head (also from the Caucasus, with Baku education) was shot.

Prior to his arrest, by the way, Beria has amnestied criminals from jails and concentration camps. They got scattered across the country inspiring horror and fear in citizens. Many of the disimprisoned came to Baku enhancing a crime wave. People were scared to go into the streets in the evening, were afraid to let their children out of homes, women dreaded entering public conveyances. You could be attacked anywhere.

The criminals got so impudent that even had the effrontery to loot-stop passenger trains. It took sufficient time to exterminate the criminals or herd them back into the prisons.

Those were the years when Azerbaijan was ruled by the Stalin's governor Bagirov, Beria's friend and the Azerbaijan Communist Party leader. He was brought to court martial trial on thirties-sixties mass repressions charge. I managed to attend one of its open court sessions.

Horrible things came to light then. Much could be said here but I will mention only what shocked me above all. It was not only mass repressions that Bagirov used to head, of which fact abundant retrospectant evidence was available. The courtroom for the most part was replenished with the rehabilitated people whom he did not manage to exterminate but whom personally used to put on the rack. Bagirov gladly participated in shooting innocent people. The Azerbaijan Communist Party building appeared to have an underground tunnel directly to the KGB jail which he used to enter the torture chamber and participate in interrogations.

Judicial sentence was fair: Bagirov together with the Azerbaijan Minister of State Security and a number of other persons under that trial were shot.

Beria and Bagirov shootings were negatively perceived by the major part of the Caucasian – Georgia and Azerbaijan – peoples. Authorities anticipated the people's unrest: May festivities (May 1st – the central Soviet holiday) were banned; mounted militiamen were roaming the streets dispersing the crowds. The cemeteries which people traditionally used for the 2nd of May picnic were closed and nobody was admitted there.

In Stalin's birthplace Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, massive anti-Khrushchev's demonstrations were suppressed by shooting which resulted in numerous casualties.

A few days later, while on a day-long business trip to Tbilisi, my friend and I have seen fresh bullet holes pocking the building walls as well as other aftermaths of the malcontent pacifying.

Coming to the end of my excursus into the history and effects of those memorable years I would like (how many times have I told that?!) to repeat: I do not use any documentary or

literary sources – I narrate only what I remember myself, have seen myself, in what participated myself.

Leaving aside my job, everyday chores, and book reading, my whole life was thick with entertainments, theater-going, attending concerts of the visiting celebrities, dating the girls – with everything natural for a young person my age without a family and children.

Next to our institution there was a "Intourist (foreign tourist)" hotel with splendid restaurant. We were often visitors there in our "glittering" marine uniform with golden stripes that inspired sympathy in the surrounding people. I have met there once Alexander Vertinsky, the legendary singer who had escaped from Russia after the 1917 coup d'etat and returned back in the 50's; it was owing to him that I managed to sit through his whole concert in the city theater. Once I found myself at one restaurant table with the renowned and popular poet Konstantin Simonov and was even lucky to shake hands with him.

Dribs and drabs, chances – though etched forever into my memory. Perhaps someone, leafing through this book one day will come across these lines and become curious about those people of whom the author tells. Internet is accessed, Google is opened, surnames are written…

JULIA, UNCHARITABLE ANGEL OF MINE

Still unmarried in my twenty five years, I lived with my mother who took care of my life and managed our household. Now and then she would cast a reproachful glance at me: well, it seems to be high time… The majority of my pals were married already, some of them had children.

But I was still looking for "an angel in the sky" – only to find her alongside.

At the beginning of 1954 the department where I worked was visited by a new employee of the paper work service – Julia. A pretty open-faced young woman with great gray eyes. Her sole appearance was just enough to inspire admiration in the eyes of the surrounding men who in eager rivalry strove for acquaintance with her, and her winning smile and easy flirtation were still greater attractions for those seeking to arrest her attention.

With all that she didn't seem a "silly-billy", neither was she light-minded. She took a sober view of outward things, and was simply admired by the impression she produced on the surrounding men, without giving them a cause for more intimate relations. She knew she was attractive. She liked it. That was her only skin-deep personality, and it took time to disclose her inner self.

And it so happened that a single "soloist" was separated from that choir of admirers, and by a twist of fate it was me.

Julia was three years younger and had a three-year daughter Elena. According to her, she used to be a civil wife of a KGB officer Shilov (surname changed) who fathered her daughter. Extra-marital affairs were discommended by the Soviet society, and according to the thenadays legislation a child born out of wedlock was considered illegitimate and had to bear his mother's family name. The birth certificate in that case had a void "father's name" line, and the child was often regarded with contempt. Her whole story should have inspired suspicion, but I was blinded by her charm.

Julia's home was at her mother's. Her mother was a doctor, a major hospital in-patient unit manager; a strict cold woman. Her father was long dead. Lena the daughter was at the children's home, never hassling anybody during her weekend home stays.

I cottoned to her at once. We started dating out of work too. The 1955 New Year we met together. Serious relations were on the way.

Julia became a frequent visitor to our home; her housekeeping skills and the ability to impress favorably won my mother's sympathy. But there was a seeming trifle that put her on my guard: it was not seldom when she showed her displeasure in rather a specific way – her face went red but she constrained herself falling into a prolonged silence, with no other expression of emotions.

It was not only sympathy but mostly an aching pity for that puzzle-headed woman, unindifferent to me, that made me take the fatal step: I proposed, and we married.

Julia moved to live with me. I was twenty-six, she – three years younger. I realize it was not a simple thing to live three of us in a single room but there was no other way. It was a common mode of living.

But that was not the only point. Yet in our prime months Julia stopped hiding her emotions and they surfaced at last: she turned to be a spiteful shrewish hysteric woman, always ready to explode. What happened to the angelic look, crimson cheeks, naïve babble?! My life became a nightmare.

As we both were employed by the same organization, Julia's permanent complaints have become a discussion topic for personnel. One of the Soviet ideology major factors was a family "moral climate" control which essentially meant nosing out and poking about somebody else's relations.

By that time, with Nikita Khrushchev at power, the so-called 'thaw" has started in all spheres of people's life. The most earthshaking was the labor legislation introduced change: working people obtained a right to quit. Many have taken advantage of the opportunity then.

Revolutionary changes were approaching the oil-producing industry. Depletion of land deposits was significant. Offshore oil fields came into focus. Artificial islands with the required equipment started emerging amid the sea waters; overpasses for transport to marine structures were under construction; and kilometers-long pipelines were being assembled.

To be exploited properly all that creation needed new types of ships, a special fleet. Thus a new ship-building facility appeared.

I was invited to that plant as a section head in a design office. It was not a professional career that became my major attraction, but the director's promise to provide a separate apartment in the abuilding residential house.

My wife has also quit and started working at the clinic where her mother was employed.

Our family relationship was about to rupture. "Sympathizing" ones were fast in informing me about Julia's new admirers left not without her response. Later I had a chance to prove the validity of that disclosure.

What caused my utmost indignation was Julia's attitude to my mother. At some moment it came to my mother being slapped by Julia in a fit of anger. Mother left home to rent a place at some people's.

The situation has become a no-go, and quite a time has elapsed until I decided to get a divorce: I simply had nowhere to go. Julia also seemed to be worried and seeked to improve

our relations trying to present her misbehavior as a simple result of her dislike for my mother. For a while cessation of arms was set.
School time soon came for Lena (Julia's daughter), and Julia has inscribed my surname into her legal papers as her father, of which fact she informed me only afterwards. I could not foresee her far-reaching plans. Lena started bearing my surname – Rosenberg, and Julia has persuaded her that I was her father and should be addressed as dad. I did not pay much attention to that. I pitied the child. Why it was she who was to arouse a derision in other children? I have seen Lena rarely: Julia never displayed any special love to her daughter having burdened her mother with rearing and caring for the child.

Well, a little time has passed and – finita la comedia! – after I have received a "You may clear off to your Israel" in my face I applied for divorce. The court procedure was not long; Julia appeared there accompanied by a young Azerbaidjanian who was keeping his adoring eyes glued to her. The judge announced the decision, and we parted.

I was lucky enough to receive a two-bedroom apartment in the already constructed by that time residence house whereto I took my mother who has gone through rather +a lot.

Julia was left in my former apartment, and rumors were that she has chosen a free and "joyful" way of life full of numerous admirers. The child caused no trouble still living with her grandmother.

In several months after the divorce I was invited to the accounts department of the plant where I was informed that a court decision was received according to which monthly alimony for the abandoned child was to be deducted from my salary.

My legs went weak: I instantly grasped all. Despite the public opinion and the well-known fact it was not my child Julia has committed unprecedented meanness. She even resigned herself to the hated Jewish surname her child was bearing.

That very same day I met her in the street and made an attempt to bring her to reason but received an impudent feedback, "You bet you'll pay, honey!" I rushed to her mother, and her incomprehensible answer was, "…a child needs considerable investments, the girl attends private musical school – it is very expensive".

My puzzled question in the court as to why I was not summoned when alimony issue was considered was answered that my presence was not needed because the papers clearly showed: "the child is yours, and you'll pay until she is 18".

I turned to lawyers who were explicit: nothing could be done because the state guards the child's interests.

It was a vicious circle. I feel powerless to describe to-day my then condition.

I was worried not so much that due to my credulity (or naivety) have found myself fooled, and perhaps a laughing-stock for evil-wishers, but that some time later I would have to deprive my own child of his due for the sake of the abandoned child of some KGB officer.

The broad daylight went dim for me. I never batted an eyelid at nights tormenting and reproaching myself for having wed a woman, to put it mildly, of not very high morals.

But the one above, the Most High, Who was managing my destiny, must have understood He had overdone it. He still had far-fetching plans as to testing my soundness. I was to be spared for future experiments; it had to be shown who was the master of the world, and He indulgently sent down a chance.

My friends, colleagues, and even unknown people who witnessed that entire affair were indignant with Julia's behavior, compassionate with me, and tried their best to help.

An acquaintance of mine, a woman from the office of public prosecutor, when informed about my problems introduced a lawyer stressing that despite being young he was very clever and lucky.

The lawyer met me at his home. He appeared a very pleasant and hospitable young man about my age. After listening to my story he agreed to take that sophisticated, as it seemed to him, case. In several days he presented his uncommon, intricate, and hope-inspiring plan according to which we started acting.

Being of outstanding talent, the lawyer has paved the way at each and every stage of that hard process. A lot of tense and difficult court levels were overcome. The prize was ours – alimony was cancelled by the court decision.

Yet for some time more Lena was still bearing my surname, but after a while her grandmother has changed it to her own.

I received congratulations from many – friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and ordinary "fans" who knew the situation being a city-wide known affair. I must stress that sympathy to me on the side of judges accompanied me at all the stages, as well as dislike to a woman who had committed a mean act.

I would like to focus on the professional juridical skills, peculiar scheme of conducting the case implemented by my lawyer, comparatively young and talented man those days. During that prolongated process and after it was over we were on friendly terms with him, until he moved to Moscow.

Only after my coming to America I learned a lot about him and was admired by his ascent: he is a person known both Russia-wide and in certain society layers of other countries – a Ph. D in Legal Sciences; a Doctor of Historical Sciences, the "Silver Ball" TV journalistic program host; a TV reviewer; literary translator; Honored Figure in Fine Arts; Professor Vitaly Wolf. In 2011 I got a message he had passed leaving a significant artistic and literary oeuvre. Internet is rich in information on that outstanding man.

And two more episodes pertaining to the theme.

Several years later, as a plant major shop young and fresh superintendent, I made a fluff which my ill-wishers tried to puff up into political case.

It happened that I have punished a group of workers for rude violation of labor discipline denuding them of their reward. Later I was advised that only one or two "instigators" were to be fined, and not the whole group. But at the plant's Communist Party Committee "the case" was formulated as: "Punishing of the working class by Rosenberg".

According to the Soviet ideology and Constitution the working class was the formal upper layer of the society. I prospected the looming reprisals – removal at the least.
During the case examination period I have received a telephone call once, and the unknown voice invited me to meet him after my working hours… at the Seafront Boulevard insisting on it being solely in my interests.
The same day I met him. In a park solitude sitting on a bench there was a young man in mufti who has at once presented a red ID with golden KGB letters on its cover.
He introduced himself as an undercover agent controlling the plant where I was employed (nobody would have been surprised those years by the KGB monitoring all organizations and

enterprises of the country – without exceptions). He informed further that my rude political misstep was known to him.
My single and natural question, why we should talk privately and not officially was answered shortly, “We are akin in some way, I am Shilov, Julia’s former husband and Lena’s father”. Meanwhile, he mentioned that he strongly doubted his fatherhood and had not swallowed the gudgeon, but it was me who had.
Then he reassured me that I had nothing to be worried about: I can exist and work as I chose (here is the benefactor!). There was no need in proceeding our intercourse – and we parted. Such was a single meeting with my “kin”.
I must add here that the hype caused by my “political case” soon has ebbed – and not because of Shilov’s influence: the plant director has had his saying and ordered to stop the pursuit; and the workers themselves with whom I had prestige and respect closed their ranks in my defense.
Another episode took place many years later, at the beginning of the 80’s (20th century). While in Baku on a business mission I have visited a friend of mine – a chief engineer of a marine designing office. Having promised a mysterious surprise he left the room leaving me alone.
After a while a young pretty woman has entered. Being unaware of my presence and perplexed, she stopped still.
I sprang to my feet, came up to her and suddenly heard, “Daddy?” I felt cold inside: “Lenka?!” We hugged each other and exchanged kisses.
It was like a dream. I was not inquisitive but still got to know that she was working there after graduating from the Economics Institute and was married. Lena invited me to her place.
In the evening I dropped at their apartment. We had no end of a time with her husband and her. Without saying a word we excluded the past from our talks. But addressing me, Lena called me “daddy”. Our farewell was a moving one and forever as I was sure for many years.
But in 2009 here in America the story of my first marriage was continued anew. Quite unexpectedly I received a call… from Lena. I was shocked to realize that she wanted, and managed, to find me. We started e-mailing and Skyping seeing each other on our monitors.
We could never talk enough, recollecting the past and narrating about the years gone. Forgetful of my own age I was amazed by Lena’s 58 (!) years. They lived and worked in Moscow. Her husband was employed by an international airport controller’s office. Lena has acquired another profession having graduated from the Foreign Languages Institute. She lectures and translates from English. She is childless. Looks great, significantly younger than her actual age.
I was moved to the innermost of my heart that knowing the story of my with Julia marriage Lena still remembers and takes me as her father (she never knew any other one). She called her grandmother with whom she spent her childhood and who has brought her up to adulthood a mother, and me… a father. She has fallen out with her mother Julia who still lived in Baku, and was not in touch with her due to her own mother’s difficult and quarrelsome nature.
That same year Lena with her husband came to stay with us at San-Francisco. Pleasant and sociable people. We welcomed them, and showed around America. In the following 2010 and 2011 years we also met to go for multi-day ocean cruises. We proceed our intercourse via Skype.
Here you have a moving story of how in my old age a loving daughter has appeared (or better say emerged?) in my life!

Many decades have elapsed since that story, and looking from the to-day's present and present age I realize that it is possible to forgive people who had hurt you long ago. I recollect Julia – a naïve girl unaware of what she was doing. We had our happy days with her, after all.
As far as I know her life was a failed one; if she is still alive she must be an old lonely woman. And I don't hold a grudge against her.
Having mentioned my friends, I feel it necessary to tell, if only in brief, about a man close to me in his outlook, understanding of morals, good and evil, and everything in the outward – Korney K., with whom we became friends on my first arrival to Baku. Our friendship lasted for over fifty years, although we lived later: in the US, in California – I; and in Moscow, Russia – he.
Korney was then an employee at the marine oil development research-and-design institute. He wrote several scientific works. He upheld a thesis and became a candidate of technical sciences (Ph. D.). By the end of 60's (20th century) he was invited to Moscow to the Ministry of Oil Industry. He worked for several years abroad – in London and Paris, made business trips to the USA.
I was a frequent visitor at Korney and his wife Galya's place in Moscow. It was them who have seen me off to emigration – to America – in 1991.
We kept in touch. Were in correspondence, spoke over the phone. I have visited Moscow several times. In 1995 they came to America to us. My wife Mara and I tried to be utmost hospitable, took them to Los-Angeles, and have had a good time together.
But in a year he was struck by a disaster. He has lost his Galya who perished under the suburban electric train during snow storm. I instantly flew to Moscow where have spent eight or ten days with him. I really felt for him – by that time I was already through the similar ordeal. His grief was perceived like my own.
Korney's attitude to me was as warm and moving as it could be only towards the very dearest person.

ROSITA, MY ANGUISH

Run of luck has set in at last. And my work at that time was felt as coming into its most active and interesting period. At the design office I was controlling engineering and implementation of unprecedented buoyant structures for marine oilfields development, thus getting wide prospects for creativity and inventions.
I was involved in the first Soviet FPSO (Floating Production, Storage and Offloading) and was awarded by the Government. I was the one to find imaginative solutions to many scientific problems for which I was rewarded with significant bonuses.
I was craving for having firsthand knowledge of the production process, to do more than I could behind the drawing-board. I was appointed the plant major shop superintendent which post has favored my significant achievements and I won authority both with the workers and engineers. In a year the Chief Fleet Management has transferred me to another plant where I have become a director soon. That sort of appointments were to be confirmed by the municipal Communist Party Committee, hence I had become a Communist Party member. In this way I became a Communist, not by conviction but for the career sake only (my bad!).

But for all that I was honest, never participating in the totalitarian Soviet regime crimes, never was involved in politics, never was mean, never committed any of the things imputed now to all who has ever been a Communist Party member.
It was a step up the career ladder, surely I was glad, and moreover, the work itself was very interesting and captivated me.
I put a lot of effort in bringing the enterprise under my management up to standard. I tried to create normal human relations with the subordinates.
When out of work, I used to communicate with friends, spent good time visiting theaters, concerts. Being a glutton of books, read a lot.
My holidays were spent outside Baku – in Sochi, Moscow, Chernigov, and Odessa.
It was in 1962 when a word came that mother's brother Semyon Balaban's (Maidenberg) who has escaped from the country as far back as in the 20's (20th century) wife Lyuba was on a tourist trip to Odessa from Israel. My mother was unaware even if he was alive by then. He appeared alive and living in Israel.
We flew to Odessa to make acquaintance with Lyuba and learn the story of Semyon Balaban and his family. Details are in the attached Appendices.
It was year 1963. For my routine summer vacation I took a flight to Leningrad (now Saint-Petersburg) to visit my friends who introduced that beautiful city to me. We used to visit museums, theaters. But most of my time I spent in their summer cottage at the Gulf of Finland shore. Miraculous sights and… miraculous time. By the end of December I was once more invited to Leningrad for a 1964 New Year party whereto I took a plane with a stopover in Moscow.
The year appeared crucial for me, a significant life period.
The next seat to mine was occupied by a young attractive girl who presented herself as Rozita. She told me that was born in Moscow but resided in Baku with her divorced mother. She was a graduate of both the Foreign Languages Institute and Musical College. Taught English and German at school. She was on her way to her father, a permanent resident of Moscow. Rozita turned to be a gregarious and witty companion. We have exchanged addresses and telephone numbers. She alit in Moscow and I proceeded my flight.
The New Year party, just as all other days of my stay there, seemed dull and uninteresting to me: time after time my memory was reproducing the face of my chance aircraft companion. After several days I flew home, and my single thought was not to lose Rozita's telephone number…
Having arrived home I made a call at once, we met… never to part.
…In February 1964 we got married; it was an unpretentious wedding among friends and acquaintances from the pedagogical and marine surroundings. Rozita (Zita) moved to live with me.
I was thirty-five then, she – ten years younger.
In the spring that same year we took a flight to Moscow to Zita's father. Her father was Katz Josef Solomonovich, a big, cheerful, loud-speaking, and merry man. The one who are called "a good social mixer". He was a medical university graduate. A WWII veteran; after it was over he went to live in Moscow. Having divorced Mikaella – Zita's mother – he got married to an actress of a Moscow theater. Was employed by different medical institutions, for several years was a chief doctor of the Soviet aircraft creator Tupolev design office's dental clinic. Tupolev and him

got on friendly terms. Tupolev was a frequent visitor to Josef's hospitable home – to get distract from everyday work, to taste the Caucasian dishes which were masterfully prepared by Zita's father, a Caucasian native; and to have a shot of vodka of course, and without extra witnessing eyes.
During that outlined here period Zita's father operated the USSR Soviet of Ministers dental clinic. Due to his position he could afford his personal private clinic which brought in extra profit and a possibility to squander money and be surrounded with multiple hangers-on.
He was the one to arrange another wedding party for his closest friends and some of my kin – Dora Perova-Maidenberg with her husband Colonel Perov who was then lecturing at the Military Academy.
Tupolev also has arrived; but he did not join the feast: he withdrew into a private room with Josef for a while and soon left. And my memory cherishes that moment of meeting a famous man.
Several days were spent in Moscow in visiting theaters, concert halls, and restaurants. At parting my father-in-law generously endowed us with presents and money to buy a piano.
After the grievous events that took place later I was careful not to keep in touch with Mikaella and Josef's numerous Moscow and Georgian relatives. Dozens of years later I made tremendous efforts to find if only some of them. And it was not until recently that I came across the Josef's tombstone photo. Who has laid out that photo in Internet I could not find out.
On December 7, 1964 Zita has delivered Vadim (David) Rosenberg – Dima. That day was the happiest in my whole life.
The child was growing up. Now all our attention and care were centered on him.
We acquired a piano. Zita was quite good in playing and singing. She had several pupils whom she taught music and languages.
In spring 1965 our infant has got a lurgy, we started panicking, and Zita went to Moscow. The illness appeared quite common, with no cause for concern.
Josef has rented a small cottage in the vicinities of Moscow, in Pushkin township, and Zita, being a teacher with long summer holidays, settled there with our boy. When my vacation time came, my mother and I joined them and spent the rest of that summer in a beautiful park zone.
1966 holidays were spent at my "second motherland" – Chernigov. We used to take long walks, swam in Desna River, went to the forest for mushroom hunting – in a word, enjoyed all the benefits of provincial Ukrainian nature.
We left Chernigov for Odessa to join my mother who was waiting for us to meet her brother Simon (Maidenberg) who came from Israel.
1967. One evening, home from work, watching Zita and the child romping about, and my mother cooking tasty dinner, and the whole beautifully furnished cozy warm apartment I had an instant thought: that was real happiness! What else can a man dream of?!
On May 30 of the same year Zita has complained in the evening of the unrelenting stomach pain. I called in an ambulance and Zita was taken to a hospital. A doctor on duty examined her and said there was no reason to be disturbed. He diagnosed her wrongly having committed a rude and inadmissible medical mistake, and left Zita in the hospital.
Twenty four hours have passed – maximum allowable term for that case – and Azerbaijan "Aesculapii" performed an operation at last. But it was already late!

On June 1, 1967 Zita has passed away in my arms. She tried to utter something before her death, but she could not speak Russian, started talking in English – I could understand nothing. Her torments were awful.
Zita's death has caused general outrage with the improper acts of doctors. I was even urged to sue them. They were found guilty but amnestied… the 1917 Revolution 50th anniversary was at hand.
Zita was only 28 when she died. She was a fine person, good wife, mother, teacher.
A huge funeral procession was allowed to go along the central street of Baku. Her final journey was accompanied by the personnel of two plants where I worked, the Fleet Management, the design office, by the teachers and pupils of the schools where she used to teach. Josef has come, as well as numerous relatives and friends from other cities.
Zita was often joking that flowers were scarce in the month of her birth in February, but on that day, the first of June, a whole sea of flowers and floral tributes surrounded her.
Great "experimenter" who was looking indifferently at what was going on in a business-like manner opened a Book of Fates, marked a square next to my surname with another mark and rubbed his hands with satisfaction: there still were unstamped squares for further experiments.
But… life had to go on, it was vital to think over how to live and what to do in that situation. All maternal chores and caring for the child who was only a little over two years old were taken by my mother. Every minute of my leisure time was also given to little Dima. I often took him with me on business trips to the sea voyages. My friends and colleagues were very attentive and bolstered up my courage seemed to be always around and helped with whatever they could.
Solomon, my father's brother, came from Odessa and after spending several days with us went, leaving an invitation to visit him.
My mother and I were still working but paid utmost attention to the child. We utilized every possible way to take the edge of his craving for mother, of his inability to understand why she was absent, where she was, and why other children had mothers but he hadn't. Such things are fearful to hear and live through!

MARINA (MARA), THE ESSENCE OF MY LIFE

Summer holidays of that same year the three of us (my mother, Dima, and I) spent in Odessa at Solomon's apartment which he placed at our disposal while he and his family were living at their summer cottage.
One day he took me with him on a visit to Marina's family who was a senior nurse at the health center where he worked. There I met her, her parents, and a sister.
I realized that it was not a chance contact but Solomon's scheme who attended to my fate.
I liked the family. Father was a retired lieutenant colonel, the WWII veteran; mother was a housewife who spent her whole life caring for the family being the officer's wife who accompanied him in moving from one military base to another. Her sister Sofia was an undergraduate student of an institute.
And Marina herself was sitting silently watching with understanding what was going on. When our eyes met we withdrew them at once.

Frankly speaking, having met Mara I got scared. The scar from my son's mother Zita's tragic death was too fresh and painful. I had no right, could not let myself to get involved into affair with another woman. But still I could not master my feelings – I could not help looking at Mara. She also liked me – I saw that, I realized that.
But what about the child, whether she could become real mother to him… A mother, not step-mother. That was my major thought which I was obsessed with those days. At the same time, I could not postpone my decision for I didn't want Dima to grow up as an orphaned child. I was not caring for my own self, though being relatively young had a right for a little bit of personal happiness.
There were still several days left of my holiday term. I introduced Mara to Dima and was watching, watching… I tried to make out what was behind her soft and gentile behavior towards the child. Was it sincere or artificial?
When running back over that time I realize how naïve I was putting the child permanently in the first ranks. I was unaware of the true allegiance and love to both of us shining through the all-discerning eyes of that charming young woman.
I returned back to Baku to meet numerous challenges the life has posed. I couldn't, literally had no right to live on there. I ought not to let other people tell Dima of that tragedy.
It was not until thirty years later that my son Dima was initiated into the secret of his birth. But this will be described in the following chapters.
Yet now, under his three years still, I protected him from the unnecessary contacts. But it could not last for long!
The problem could be unambiguously met by moving to another city.
I have already described the compelling circumstances a Soviet citizen was confronted with when he wanted to change his address. Odessa was my unique yen. For all that, I had relatives there. And it was a seafront city good for my marine profession. But how and where shall I get a dwelling? Will I find any job? And last but not least, what about my mother?
I was tormented by the problems. Meanwhile my mother has bought an apartment in a co-operated house which was about to be finished.
In that same year of 1967 I was writing my diploma project which was to be presented in December.
Our relations with Mara being only perfunctory, I took a flight to Odessa once more in November and stayed at her parents' apartment where she lived. And again all our talks were centered on the child. At times Mara would look at me perplexed why I did not notice anything. Why should not I take courage to kiss her or at least embrace?
But notwithstanding all that we were discussing the ways to secure our relations and planned my moving to Odessa. With that we parted.
In December I excelled in presenting my graduate degree work and received my second specialty of the naval mechanical engineer (M.E.). Until then I was a qualified naval architect. Although I didn't belong to the Navy the established routine demanded my regular military training in Sevastopol and Novorossiysk, and I was even promoted in my officership.
Dima was in the kindergarten, mother has retired.
Mara was busy opting for a Baku – Odessa apartment interchange. We were in permanent telephone and correspondence contact.
Our correspondence was not a trivial one. She was addressing Dima, and he "answered" her.

Surely it were us who corresponded, but such was a game we have launched. These letters are interesting being of special kind, I have them in store. One of these is found in Appendix.
Mara often sent parcels to Dima with toys and Odessa candies. She from her side and I from mine were gradually paving the way for Dima to meet his "new" mother without recollecting the past.
By that time the house where my mother has bought an apartment was finished. I transported her with her all belongings and helped to settle down. And Mara at last, with all her inherent energy and efficiency, has found an apartment for interchange – and our problem was settled.
My moving preparations were nothing but success. With the help of my friends I received the official transfer to Odessa.
In summer of 1968 I bade farewell to Baku, a city where I have lived for sixteen years. Where my most significant life events have taken place, where my son was born, where I have achieved quite a progress in my business career.
I took leave of my numerous friends, with my dear Rozita's grave.
I left my mother with a promise to take her to my place as soon as I was through with settling down.
I was going the same way as I have once used to come to Baku, but now it was reversed: together with Dima we took a train to Moscow and further on to Odessa by plane.
In Moscow we met Zita's and mine friends and relatives, Zita's father Josef included. His conduct was precise, without reminding Dima of his deceased mother.
Odessa airport those times lacked modern equipment. Planes used to stop somewhere at the runway at a distance from the airport building whereto passengers had to go on their feet. Welcomers were waiting behind the fence.
We alit from the plane. At that very moment Mara managed to "break through" the fence and was running to us with a flower bouquet. Little Dima shouting "mummy" was running to her. They stood embracing each other in the airfield, and tears welled up in my eyes.
I might be extra prolific in details, over pathetic. But that was the way it went, and that picture is still before my eyes.
I kowtow before a woman who has overwhelmed my son Dima with endless love and warmth of her soul, never giving occasion to anybody to doubt sincerity of her thought or words!

ODESSA AND MORE…

In summer of 1968 we got married. I was thirty nine then, Mara – ten years younger.

She moved to live in my efficiency. We were far from lamenting, life was settling into shape little by little. Not for a second did I regret my choice – Mara turned out a good and caring mother for Dima, always on the alert for the only thing – to prevent "kind hearts" from elucidating Dima on what we took great pains to keep to ourselves. That was our reason for avoiding home parties with our acquaintances and kinsfolk. We avoided those who could spill the beans even without any malicious intent. More so that Mara never left a single handle for her associates to suspect her of being less loving and devoted than his mother.

I went on with my work at the Black Sea Shipbuilding Design Company. My position there was a way below my previous ones; I had to learn to live with that.

Mara started working at the traumatic surgery of the municipal clinic, treating and restoring functions of the locomotor system. She was continuously progressing and updating her skills which made her a respected and city-wide popular expert in that field. Now in America, indulging in her favorite job she managed to win respect and love of her numerous American patients.

To my great pity, my mother was still in Baku; for the time being we could not get her to live with us. We were in permanent search for exchanging her Baku apartment for a dwelling in Odessa.

My mom was not just a good friend of Dima – he was her major joy and light of her life. Dima returned her feelings most kindheartedly; the relations between him and his beloved granny were the best ever imagined. From his early childhood, no sooner had he learned ABC he started writing letters to her; they were engaged in correspondence for many years since.

Those letters I have preserved and placed them in a book published here in America, "From Baku to San Francisco in Twenty-Five Years" (Dima turned 25 when he got to America). A sampler of those letters has become a diary of my son's childhood.

I cannot but gladly mention Rosita's mother here – Mikaella Leibman – an unaffected artless woman who regarded with favor everything that took place after her daughter's death, without reservations and ambitions. Moreover, she took to Mara, never giving out any jealous feeling.

Many years in turn Mikaella used to spend summer months with us when we had where to accommodate her. She was known to be my mom's sister. How could we refuse her?!

As time went by, our successive interchanges of the apartments resulted at last in a more comfortable and spacious flat in Odessa's downtown main street – Deribasovskaya.

My job has also undergone changes. I was long on patience for a promised position, but with promotion postponed I left my job for a power plants construction enterprise where I had to master specific skills uncommon for my major.

I was employed as a production manager and had to pass a "steeplejack" medical examination of which term I had rather a vague idea.

I had to run power equipment mounting – turbines, steam boilers, generators – at the state power plants under construction. That work was underlain by a need to visit different regions of the country.

My first "jobsite" was at the Moldavian power plant construction (near Tiraspol) which was meant to supply electric energy to Moldavia, Romania, and Odessa district. When I appeared at the construction site I was at a loss: I could not have foreseen novelty, complexity, and risk of the work. Permanently as high as 200-300 feet above the ground. I was given time for getting my bearings and making things out, and soon I mastered new profession.

I lived in the engineers' hotel, and spent my days off in Odessa which made each of my visits a little holiday for all of us.

In the summer of 1970 I rented a small apartment in the new abuilding town Dnestrovsk neighboring the power plant where I worked, and for a term of Mara's holidays brought there her, Dima, and my mother who has come for a guest visit from Baku.

On leaving Odessa our attention was called to the absence of the approaching cars. It appeared cholera epidemic has trapped Odessa. The city was virtually closed, both entrance

and exit. We were lucky to have that narrow escape. Hard luck was destined for thousands of Odessites, as well as a wealth of visitants, tourists, and other Odessa guests.

After the quarantine was lifted my family went home, but I had the next major power plant construction ahead of me in town of Ladyzhin. Being too far from home, it prevented me from spending my days off with the family. Three or four months I did not see them.

While in Ladyzhin, a place where during the WWII thousands of Jews, my grandfather Ilya Balaban included, were exterminated in the concentration camps I visited the common grave.

After the regular power-producing unit was mounted I was sent for a practical training to the Novovoronezh atomic station. Which had to be succeeded by a long-term mission to Armenia where an atomic station was under construction. As I was already cheesed off with the Caucasus, and living in a semi-desert terrain without my family was not a captivating prospect I felt it better to quit.

Both the Dnestrovsk town and Moldavian power plant neighbor a huge agro-industrial enterprise – sovkhoz*; its management suggested that I take the vacancy of a chief construction engineer.

Working and living conditions were improbable: the highest possible salary, official car, regular huge bonus by the year end, and other benefits. Well now, if there is one to withstand all that?! And I made up my mind.

I was given a splendid house with an orchard. Unseen before salary was paid. Farm commodities, honey and fish included, were sold at fabulously low for a city dweller prices.

As to my official duties, they needed maximum efficiency: 24 hours, any time of day or night, holidays and days off I had to be in “operational status”.

Under my supervision enterprises of the modern agro-industrial center were constructed: a twenty five acres greenhouse complex; constructions – refrigerators; automated cattle-breeding complex; canning factory; official and residential buildings. And it is far from complete list of what I had to deal with.

Mara has quit her office in Odessa and became a kindergarten doctor there. Dima entered the local Dnestrovsk school.

My sovkhoz life took over two years. I could have worked on but Mara broke down. She didn’t want to live out of town, in uncivilized environment, without a habitual job. And what is first and foremost – she could not bear her everlastingly perturbed, losing flesh husband, having no peace.

We returned to Odessa. Before leaving there, I cast a glance at the fruits of my two-year labor – everything in which I took a hand or, rather often, initiated by me – and thought impudently: I am leaving behind the vestiges of my presence.

Thus a circle of the organizations inconsistent with my major line was completed, and I returned to my native marine environment. I was employed as a head of the design department at a newly-constructed shipbuilding plant in Ilyichevsk, a satellite town of Odessa.

Dima was obsessed with new ideas and passions which Mara and I encouraged and supported – collecting, modeling, drawing, music. He managed everything being at the same time a straight A-student at school. He started assembling crystal radio sets, acoustic devices.

But his major passion those years was for cosmos. The history of space flights; everything pertaining to each Soviet and American astronaut; details of their flights Dima has studied thoroughly.

I often took Dima with me on business trips to Moscow. With the help of an acquaintance of mine at the Moscow Space Exploration Institute Dima managed to visit that world-wide known center and even meet two Soviet cosmonauts and receive a book from them with a dedicatory inscription. His joy was boundless.

In summer of 1980 our housing activity came to its end at last: we found a pleasing apartment suitable to be exchanged for a Baku flat, and my mother moved to Odessa. By that time she has already retired but still was a cheerful, young-looking and vigorous woman.

Mara was working in the municipal clinic and had numerous private patients.

Dima has transferred to another school with physics and mathematics as majors, acquired lots of friends and girl-friends, actively participated in the literary and musical performances of the popular youth club.

Life went on as usual. Threatening signs seemed to be absent.

And once more, like once in Baku, one ordinary evening when our whole family has gathered I had a flashing thought: “Here is happiness, don’t distress yourself, don’t look back, hopefully anticipate future; there is nothing you can be punished for by your fate”.

MOTHER

Mom was living two or three blocks from us. She visited us regularly and did her utmost to help.

By the end of May 1981, on the eve of Dima’s first final, when we were engaged in trying to deduce the to-morrow’s Russian literature essay themes she dropped in to wish good luck and pleading poor health went home.

It was the last of her we saw.

On his way home after the exam the next day Dima decided to call on his granny but didn’t find her. We were informed that she had not spend that night at home.

It was not until later that we could restore what had happened that night. After leaving us, on her way home she went to the flower market to buy flowers for Dima – to congratulate him on finishing school – and suddenly fell. Cerebral hemorrhage – instant death. She was sixty-eight. We buried her in the same grave where my father was laying since 1940.

What else can be said about my mother in addition to what was narrated in the preceding chapters of this book? Her impact on my life cannot be overemphasized.

Her whole life, attention, care, thoughts, and concern after my father’s death were given to me. When Zita died, all her subsequent years were devoted to my son Dima as well, despite she was living far apart. I feel I have done my filial duty toward my mother in full. Concern for her was of prime importance for me, often coming into conflict with my personal interests.

I keep the letters she used to write to me and Dima. One of these is cited in the Appendices.

Leaving Odessa for America I attended to my parents' grave to be not left without care. Fresh flowers bloom there each summer.

In a year or two Zita's mother Mikaella Leibman also died.

In 1981 Dima finished his school an A-student, with numerous certificates and prizes for profound knowledge of physics and mathematics. By that time he has mastered his English rather well. For that purpose we had a private tutor who taught him English at home since 1973. We were often visitors to the port where used to meet foreign seafarers or cruise liner passengers, thus offering Dima a chance to practise his target language.

I longed to see my son an intellectually mature advanced person, and I realized that mastering of foreign language backed up his cultural and educational level. It appeared crucial for his employment and assimilation in a New World – in America.

And just for now we were confronted by a problem of his entering the institute. In "that" life "persons of Jewish nationality" were substantially hindered by the state. Secretly established percentage of Jewish entrants was a sort of a closed door in the fat part of the higher educational institutions. More so if they belonged to the "mere mortals" without good connections or money they could squander on bribes. High standard of knowledge and schooling were no object. At the entrance exams the academics who were instructed respectively could easily find a possibility for underestimating the Jewish entrant, notwithstanding his or hers excellent knowledge. It was no secret that in Odessa the lists of those liable to be accepted to the higher educational institutions were completed long before the entrance exams. Dima was well coached, spending his summer on studies with tutors despite his good grounding. He was of no mean abilities, could pass any most complicated exams and enter any higher educational institute of the country.

On the threshold of the exams to the Odessa Polytechnical University of our mutual choice, literally with neither sleep nor rest Dima was preparing for the exams.

He was unaware it was not what could seal his fate, actually he had a snowball's chance in hell of entrance exams to any of Odessa higher educational institutions. In case he fails he will be drafted, and God forbid imagining what he will have to undergo there!

The whole summer of 1981 we were doing our utmost searching for a decision and what is called "the right people". And it was Mara who found that single one thing we needed badly – assurance of the "influential" institute official to treat Dima fairly at the exams, giving him his due, and no more. Dima had to have a first-rate training, giving himself no easy time. It would suffice – we believed in our son.

And what a joy it was, when mixed with a crowd of other parents, to see him leaving the University with his raised open palm signifying victoriously the best possible last exam mark – five.

Ra-a-a-ah! Accepted! Our son has become a student.

Years of lull and calm have come. Dima was getting on well with his studies.

He never set aside his infatuations – music, youth club, summer camping trips to Carpathian Mountains, rafting down the Mountain Rivers, skiing.

And, of course, dated the girls causing our natural parental jealousy to his choice.

By that time I was already working at the organization that had given initial start to my Odessa "orbit", shifting positions, professions; acquiring experience and skills in the hitherto untried fields.

The Black Sea Shipbuilding Design Company was renamed into the Marine Scientific Institute where I got a position of the new technology project monitoring sector head. It was a multi-faceted and interesting job. It has pumped me up in popularity and authority among the personnel.

That Institute was the last "labor berth" in my life: in 1990 I retired.

These were the years when we have restored connections with our relatives abroad; several times have visited Budapest; were corresponding with Israel.

Summer vacations were spent in different places – in Moscow, Leningrad, on Black Sea cruises. We bought a car. Weekends were spent roaming the suburbs and neighboring forests. Frequented the estuaries surrounding Odessa, and far-off Black Sea beaches. Used to go to Moldavia, to local towns and villages, and not solely out of tourist interest: cheap fruits and vegetables were available there together with imported garments – all critical commodities excessively priced by Odessa profiteers.

Dima was about to graduate. His last practical training was at the radio engineering plant in Riga (Latvia). When on business trip to Leningrad (to-day's Saint-Petersburg) I visited him there.

He took me on a sightseeing tour around the city. We strolled about the beautiful Riga streets, stopped at the cozy European-type bars, and leaving them moderately dizzy experienced immeasurable happiness induced by our association. The days are seldom, but they are when nothing vital seems to happen, however they get etched into one's memory forever – such were those days for me.

Among other things in the Polytechnic University military science was introduced, and the first officer's rank was assigned. In his final year Dima, together with other students, was sent to a tank division based in Tiraspol (Moldavia) for a military training which resulted in the assigned rank of the Soviet Army senior lieutenant of the reserve.

With the car, we could often visit him on weekends, sometimes with his beloved girlfriend. Took him to the Dniester River shore, fed with home-made food and let him look aside from military drill.

Now I will set you laughing: two years after Dima was deprivated of Soviet citizenship and emigrated to America we (in Odessa still) received a call-up paper from a military commissariat* with invitation: "Vadim Rosenberg ought to come for receiving a promotion".

It is a right place now to cite the famous phrase of Russian classic: "Russia's two mischiefs – fools and roads".

In 1984 Dima graduated and started working in a research institution where he took a keen interest in the just emerged computers and programming.

Summer of 1986 we spent with Mara touring over Ukraine and Belorussia. Shortly before a Chernobyl explosion had taken place. It so happened that on our way to Kiev we got diverged from the route and found ourselves somewhere around the ill-fated nuclear power plant.

Chernobyl inhabitants were already evacuated by then; the zone itself was cordoned off. We realized that on our way back only when caught the surprised faces of the police in the cordon on the road. The car wheels were disinfected and we were scolded.

The scope of the disaster and its possible aftermaths were unsuspected then. Information about it, like any other cataclysm during the Soviet ruling, was carefully concealed which led to new victims among the population.

We visited several Ukrainian and Belorussian towns. Passed through the most beautiful places, giving ourselves a reprieve in a forest or at the rivers or pond-fronts.

Our trip's terminal was Chernigov where we spent eight or nine days at our relatives.

It was interesting to revisit the scenery of my youth, to meet some of my school friends still abiding there.

In the precedent years I have made some visits to Chernigov over significant time intervals. I was there with Julia, with Rosita, and now with Mara.

Just then Dima was on a rafting trip down the mountain river Belaya with his future wife Svetlana Tsargorodskaya, also a student of the Polytechnical University. It was during our Chernigov stay that he called up to inform about his matrimonial intentions.

On return to Odessa we met Svetlana's parents and together started preparing the wedding party which took place in October 1987.

Our son moved to his wife into a larger flat, and we both were left behind to get accustomed to his absence, missing him and looking forward to his visits and telephone calls.

Nothing seemed to herald the forthcoming changes.

But those were the last years of the Soviet Union existence.

Perestroika [reorientation] and glasnost [publicity] declared by the empowered Mikhail Gorbachev led to a result quite unpredictable even for him – the power itself has crumbled and fallen.

As a newly-born stream sweeps ahead and away garbage and small waste, in the like way the dramatically changing Soviet society has surfaced all dirt that has been in store within for long years – a terrible increase in crime; unseen before distribution and burglary of state property by the heavens know wherefrom shown up hustlers; decline of culture; prostitution.

Changing by leaps and bounds Russian society took the unprecedented freedom in its own way, defining it as iniquity and permissiveness and handled it accordingly.

From the former illegal traders and financial wheeler-dealers, the Communist Party and Komsomol leaders - a new, crime-impregnated class was being formed consisting of entrepreneurs and desperate for power latter-day peanut politicians.

One of perestroika results was mass emigration enabled by the new regime and actively realized by the society.

TO LEAVE OR NOT TO LEAVE? IT IS A MUST TO LEAVE!

The first to take the opportunity to exit abroad, primarily to the USA, Canada, Australia, and Israel, were those with documented Jewishness. It was them who were legally accepted by the above countries.

(By the end of 1989 "the gates" to those countries were shut for all other than next of kin who were admitted for the sake of "family reunion" which was readily utilized by the "vanguard" refugees).

The vast majority of cases were promoted by the invitations from the diplomatically inaccessible Israel with relations severed by the Soviet Union since the 1967 six-day war; all contacts were available exceptionally through the Dutch Embassy in Moscow. To receive the invitation one had to state the availability of relatives living in "the promised land", while the ultimate goal of those eager to leave the country was, with few exceptions, America.

The emigrants who were lucky to exit by September 30, 1989 and receive the "refugee" official status were backed up by just the above invitations.

Both formally and on everyday level those leaving Jews were treated extremely negatively. They were condemned, despised, and called "the traitors".

At the beginning of the 70's (20th century) when emigration was not an exodus still, sometimes walking past the OVIR* I often found myself an interested observer of people fighting among themselves for a place in a queue and casting unfriendly looks at the curious passers-by.

It was time when I considered the goers to be basically the lower class people: small artisans; profiteers preying on the goods and provisions scarcity in the country and fearing the punishment; sundry dodgers and hardheads in pursuit rather of "dolce vita" and riches than political aims. Soon I realized that it was a superficial judgment though the current opinion also was not at all violating the truth. Formal pretext for the desire to leave was a wish "to return to the ancestral home – Israel" and reunite with the supposedly living there relatives, and of course, to escape anti-Semitism – the major and absolutely rightful argument which was seriously taken by the adopting countries and gave a right for receiving a "refugee" status.

Further pattern was as simple as that: finding themselves in Vienna, and later on in Rome – the distribution center for Soviet emigration those years – our refugees "quite of a sudden" displayed amazing forgetfulness.

They took to declaring that the ancestral land (that is Israel) stopped being an attraction for them and turning their backs on the "promised land" recruiters started for America, Canada, Australia as more attractive rich, fat, and safe countries.

On no account shall I condemn them for that.

I am mostly puzzled by those who, on coming to America, with undisguised indifference, and even arrogance treat Israel. "Smartly" discussing its morals and drawbacks and forgetting who is to be primarily blessed for their "American dream" coming true.

The key wave of emigration comprised of Jewish intellectuals swept along several years later. But still in the preceding years a chance to leave the country forever was appealing and exciting for those who due to the received higher education have got more or less stabilized living: engineers and physicians; scientists and lawyers; writers and actors, and much more from this category. Different reasons and fear of committing a fatal flaw hindered the decision-making.

Over-risky was an unexplainable exit refusal of the authorities fraught with losing one's public and official status which have been built up many years; a person used to be turned into a Soviet social outcast. Of special concern were the individuals connected, if even somehow, with the half-secret military-oriented enterprises and secret documentation; the CPSU members and Soviet Army ex-servicemen, and the like. Those with the exit permit feared to jeopardize the relatives to be left behind. But the most embarrassing thing was the absence of any valid information: in the 70's (20th century) all contacts with people who have deserted the

country were cut by the undercover censorship; one had to contrive the roundabout ways to receive a piece of news and moreover – an invitation from Israel.

I will expound those events in the part related to our family.

Mara and I, as well as her parents and sister, were not subjected to the emigration euphoria. And not because we were so well-off or (God forbid!) Soviet power fans – we knew its worth. We couldn't understand, and still didn't amplify upon the psychology of the deserters viewing the events with mere curiosity. Huge organizations where we worked reported of only scarce instances of such exits despite the sufficient number of Jews, and it was not the subject of wide speculation.

Svetlana's parents were eager to leave when she was not married yet. When Dima joined their family he seconded the idea, and Mara and I had nothing left to do but accept it and even help them.

Our family has gone through all the above stages, having experienced in full measure their complexity and uniqueness.

And the whole epic was rather difficult, starting from the reception of the Israeli invitation. Mailing was under the regime supervision, and the like operations were strongly suppressed.

In the summer of 1988, while on holidays in the Baltic Sea region, I turned to my mother's brother Shimon Balaban – an Israeli native – with a request of invitation for Dima, Sveta, and her parents which was received in no time (mail service between Israel and Baltic Sea Republics was out of control).

Availability of invitation promoted a months-long motion towards the exit from the country. And here difficulties as to the country of destination sprang up. They are forgotten to-day, and more to that, their participants deny them. Well, okay, but it's me who remembers.

I narrate all this merely for the sake of history. Perhaps the descendants will be interested in the way the family of my son had found itself in America. Dima gave a detailed account of all that in his letter from Vienna.

Dima's first letter after his departure

Vienna, August 12, 1989

Hello, my dear parents!

We are easy and comfortable, about to start for Italy. Lots go to Israel from here. We'd rather follow them but it seems now impossible for us: too tough it was on us from the very beginning. For we all – both Sveta and I and her parents strove for Israel. But my father's ban imposed on us without discussing the issue with the participants of the "project" made us go against our wishes. We regret now that we were so in earnest about it.

But if earlier it was only me, now it is a concern of three of us. That was the reason for altering the whole pre-departure process. After my father started hurrying us to go we sent our luggage and parcels to America, bought "goods" to be sold in Vienna and Rome, but instead could make without all that lumber and go directly to Israel in cool mood, having sent there from Odessa all furniture, money, and odds and ends!

But that's not the point, what matters is the fact that as a result we all go where we were not destined from the very beginning, without any grounds for that. A tremendous lot of force, nerves, time was spent.

And we have an unwelcome ultimate goal ahead of us – a foreign, cold, and cruel America – it is an absolute truth! Instead of all that we could have been long ago at home, in Israel, where we are awaited, and you, and all our relatives are welcomed.
Sveta's parents have a grudge against father's ban imposed on Israel because of me; that he didn't treat our plans and problems seriously having decided instead of us. And if we are refused, well, we shall go to Israel all the same of course, but having gone through an ordeal, having spent everything, with all our belongings sent to the USA and, besides, with our benefits reduced. And if we go to the States (in case the status is obtained) – I am not sure it will be a good way out.
We socialize with many here who have already been to the States. Their impressions are awful: wild, mad country where dollar rules everything; life for the sake of dollar; neither humanity nor kindness. They all are strangers there, everything is for money only, and to get it one must work hard. Immigrants who are abundant there experience significant stress.
All Europeans treat American medical care badly, while the Israeli medicine surpasses even European one. It is almost unattainable goal to get into a municipal kindergarten, nobody cares about newborns, and no one renders help – neither the state, nor firms.
Still in Israel (lots have been there and lived) everything is quite opposite. Besides, it is a native country, for we have no other! And why should one fear army service – after all, somebody has to protect my daughter!
Yes, the USA are out of any war, but who can guarantee our daughter in that horrible world against street-walking or drug addiction, that she won't be killed by bandits or drunken driver? That is all real there!
Children do not obey their parents there, they are influenced only by society since they are twelve. And the children of immigrants are destined to find themselves in the worst layers of that society.
Israel is a European-type country with habitual life principles, quiet and calm despite the everlasting war with the Arabs. It is only in Israel that Sveta can proceed her education.
While in the USA – God grant me manage some courses, and Sveta most likely will remain a simple housewife; draftswoman at best.
Well, please accept my apologies for this far for pleasant letter. I feel very upset: Sveta and I longed for Israel before that "campaign" has started, more so that such close relatives turned out there.
We might receive American status and get to the USA soon. But I doubt however that we have chosen the right way and could not but share my thoughts with you.
Our best regards to all our Israeli relatives, we may meet soon (God grant, we shall not receive the American status!).
Please advise all those eager to exit to hurry up: the emigrants stream thickens day after day – there is a saying spread here that is not emigration but evacuation!

Many kisses. Dima.

I took a principled stand then giving my consent to his departure only on condition of his going to America with his whole family, not to Israel. I was actively opposed but stood unbiased led by my unmistakable paternal instinct.

After long hesitation and reflections Mikhail – Sveta's father – still said to Dima, "Wrong as your father is, but we rather not go against him and start for America". Thanks God, all went that way.
Sveta was ninth months gone. But they had to hurry up: a delay meant the gates to America to be closed forever.
Due to her numerous connections with the right people Mara managed to accelerate the paper work until September 30, 1989 when issuing of visas to Vienna and then to Rome where the emigrant streams from the Soviet Union were formed was to be terminated by OVIR.
By the way, after that date the stream of Russian refugees of Jewish origin with their families has become fuller on its way to Israel which increased the population of that small country by almost a million people.
In August of 1989 we have seen Dima with his family off to Uzhgorod and bid farewell to them hiding our tears.
Those were hard times, the situation in the country was under permanent changes, future was unpredictable, and fear to be parted forever was our constant obsession.
A question arises: why we, as well as Mara's parents, didn't go with our children.
Mara's only sister Sofa has by that time just divorced her husband Stanislav, son of General Eremchenko (second-in-command of the Belorussian military district). She has left him because of his disgraceful behavior. She led solitary life in the general's apartment with her fifteen year old daughter Julia about to finish her school who also didn't want to know her ne'er-do-well father.
And we found ourselves in a very simple but desperate situation: Mara couldn't leave her parents, and her parents couldn't leave Sofa and Julia who was denied her father's consent to departure.
Eremchenko was unambiguous: "I will never let the Russian General's granddaughter to be taken to Israel".
To his horror, just that has happened: a year later Sofa has at last received her former husband's consent to his daughter's departure (he was already very little perturbed – he has got a new family by that time), and "the Russian General's granddaughter" left for Israel… with a cross on her breast (stressing her Russian Orthodox origin).
As time went by, Julia has served her due term of service in Israeli army, received good education, and… took her cross off. She got married, was successful in her career which may be judged from the fact, if nothing else, that for three years she was an appointed Consul of Israel in Ukraine; she has two children. She is happy and fancies herself in no other country.
Sometime after Dima's departure we have received a guest invitation from Shimon Balaban and started to Israel. We have got an opportunity to become acquainted with the country where Dima could have found himself as the fates decree.
When in Israel, our principal concern was still our son's and his family's fates. We corresponded, talked on the telephone. It was there where we got happy news about our granddaughter Nicole Rosenberg's birth in Vienna.
After a month's stay in Vienna Dima with Sveta and Nicole moved to Rome where her parents were already staying awaiting for their fates to be decided.

They were still strengthening their opinion that it was only due to my allegedly erroneous persistence that they had to strive for the departure to the "bad and evil" America instead of easily reaching "good and safe" Israel.
In November of 1989 all Dima's family was taken from Rome by literally the last special aircraft (the Russian emigration agency was already about to stop its activity) to the USA, city of San-Francisco.
Sad and difficult were those two years of separation from our son. We were living in the permanent expectation of letters, telephone talks with him. Didn't know what was ahead.
The country lived in anticipation of the political and economic collapse, and people around us, each in one's own manner, tried to meet their challenges in that changing world.
Odessa, a city with a fat part of population being Jewish, got soaked with atmosphere that contributed to the decision "to go".
And once again difficulties sprang up: Mara's father, the retired Lieutenant Colonel, the WWII veteran, career serviceman still cherishing his "Jewishness" found it only logical and honest to emigrate exclusively to Israel. We didn't even try to make him change his mind – we ourselves didn't know what was ahead of us. The only thing we wished was reunion with our son and his family.
At the Soviet-Romanian border we left Mara's parents, sister, and Julia the niece. It was almost unbearable to view Mara's parting with them: they never were separated until then. We bid farewell without the slightest idea what was in store for us in the future.
We were left alone. As the family was dissipated in different countries, nothing could anchor us in Odessa. On receiving a "family reunion" invitation from Dima we started preparing for our departure.
By that time I was already a retired pensioner. I quit the Communist Party of which I was only a nominal member who never shared its policy and ideology.
Lots of people from my organization appeared to be longing to leave. The environment was neither disturbed by that nor indignant: new times have come.
Mara was still working, but her nervousness as to the fates and lives of her nearest and dearest occupied her whole self. Our days were spent on drudgeries, troubles, running through the chain of command.
When we had some free time we took our car and went as far from the city as we could to the sea shore where we strolled along, fed the sea gulls, felt melancholy and were silent for long brooding over the same things and understanding each other without words. We grieved listening to the songs Dima had recorded for us prior to his departure from Odessa.
Mara's parents' family was little by little settling down. They didn't complain, steadfastly withstanding all immigration hardships.
"Desert Storm" war with Iraq suddenly turned up out of the blue. To prevent negative world reaction the Americans hindered Israel from participating in it. The Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein started bombarding his hated Israel with rockets.
How can I describe Mara's state then? During long hours she was listening with her ears glued to the radio-set to the American and Israeli "voices": the Soviet authorities still were in the habit of jamming those radio broadcasts to suppress the truthful information.
Still that war was at last over. We sighed with relief: one reason less for being disturbed.

The year of 1991 has come – the year when we, speaking the language of sports, stepped onto our homes traight – everything was prepared, it was only the exit permit we had to receive.
I won't describe all ordeals and nervous breakdowns of that period: lots have gone through the same, and each one has his own ones.
We bid farewell to Odessa, to our friends, to memorable places, to the graves of people close to us and started for Moscow ahead of time.
We stopped at Korney's apartment, underwent necessary procedures, processed all papers, and… farewell, Motherland!
We left Moscow for New York on board the Pan-American aircraft just a week before the final collapse of the Soviet Union where we were born, where have lived the significant part of our lives.
I am not inclined to curse and insult that country. Despite all troubles and hardships of the Communist regime with its lack of civil rights, despite all tragedies and losses in my private life still I cherish good unforgettable memories.
My youth was left there, my son was born there, I was happy there with my favorite job. Yet I was leaving it without any remorse: I couldn't make myself like it as one can't like cruel step-mother. It was that country that didn't like me and has thrown me out like an unloved step-son. As to us, we were going to meet our only son which was of prime and utmost importance. It underlaid our mood and our belief in future.

SERENE AND SHADOWY SKIES OF AMERICA

And here it is – America, the melting pot, a country to refuge all those destitute, chased out, suffering who lived needy and powerless in their native countries, persecuted on different grounds. But nowadays one shouldn't follow in the steps of the pioneering settlers who had to apply all their courage and perseverance to survive the hardships in disclosing the New World.

My numerous American relatives have restored the history of their antecedents from Russia up to the name of the vessel that had brought them to America at the beginning of the 20th century.

Soon after spending our first month with Dima's family at their rented apartment we moved to ours; acquired a car and started exploring the new world step by step.

Nothing unusual or interesting deserving to be narrated was going on: the same as with other immigrants of our generation.

Dima and his family showed great concern for our problems, helping us assimilate into American society. We did what was within our powers, looking after our granddaughter Nicole who was two years old by that time.

Mara started at once working in an American family nursing the newly born child – Taylor. I helped her as much as possible. It was not only a substantial material help but an opportunity to master our English rubbing shoulders with the Americans. Mara's persistence soon made her rather fluent in English.

That our first American family has become our friends for many years since. After a while they have got another boy – Connor. He was christened with us both as godparents. To-

day Taylor and Connor are adult young men but still remember us and pay visits from time to time.

She possessed a keen sense of love and devotion to her nearest and dearest, and being separated from them was upsetting for her. At last in 1992 we received all necessary American papers and started for Israel where Mara could meet her parents, sister, and niece, view their life there – and calm down at last. After that trip we became annual visitors to Israel, came to love that country, admired all its beauty; used to meet our "fellow countrymen", acquired a lot of new friends.

Once (I don't remember the year) we met a pleasant middle-aged woman, an engineer by profession, a former Odessite*. Dina L. was divorced and had emigrated to Israel with her daughter's family who soon left Israel for America. Dina was waiting for her USA residence permit, spending most of her time as a guest there. It so happened that we appeared the "next door neighbors" which made our intercourse rather often. Could I have calculated then…

Finding myself in America at sixty-two I couldn't claim work according to my profession or any work at all, language difficulties considered. I took up everything I could manage – helped the house supervisor as a handyman, delivered children to schools. During our initial years I helped Mara with children nursing and was her "personal" driver in her distant and close-by trips to "private" patients.

Yet she herself, due to her perseverant, active, and ambitious character didn't want to be assimilated with the majority of her former compatriots of her age who used to lead calm regular life owing to public assistance.

She completed several different courses; her medical diploma received in the Soviet Union was verified. With her great former practice, she had sufficient and stable private clientele in the English-speaking environment.

In two or three years after the arrival, she was granted a medical license and started working in a specialized clinic where she was engaged in both the locomotorium post-traumatic functional recovery and therapeutic massage.

It was not only her work results that made her popular but also her inherent personal magnetism and sympathy she inspired in people with whom she used to socialize.

Through her, we acquired a lot of acquaintances and friends in the English-speaking milieu. We exchanged regular visits, attended family occasions, weddings, and birthday parties. The clinic manager's husband was a San-Mateo town mayor, thus we were honored to be invited to their several official gala receptions.

Despite the pressure of her work, Mara used to spare three-four summer weeks for visiting her Israeli relatives, and we even went for a European sightseeing tour once.

I'll take courage here to paraphrase the great Russian classic Leo Tolstoy: "All happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy its own way". Hammering away at my writings, it dawned upon me that they lack detailed depiction of the clear, cloudless and safe periods of life, or they are scarce in contrast to the tragic, sorrowful times that are described vividly.

Moreover, the reader may end up misinterpreting my life as a sort of a long ordeal, a rough sea voyage when you can only rest and sink into a reverie feeling happy at the rare beautiful and green sun-lit islands.

So what? It can't be helped; it may be therein where the human memory and psychology patterns manifest themselves: the bad is memorized being of your own, and the good – we all have it identical, and we all know what it is like.

The year of 1997 has come, the year of formidable tragedy, enormous, incomparable loss, when life became broken and senseless.

We were seeing the New Year in with our Russian-speaking friends company – all our age - in San Francisco; spent a very interesting night enjoying ourselves, happy and optimistic towards the future.

That year started with success and progress for us: we have become American citizens. Mara got a driver's license, we bought a new car. We hopefully looked forward to obtaining benefit rental payment of our expensive apartment.

Our children were also quite comfortable: they have bought a house, new cars. Dima has got fixed up in a new job, getting a prestigious position. His wife Svetlana has graduated from the University; Nicole was growing up, has started her school.

Our healths never failed us; but quite of a sudden by the end of April Mara felt unwell. She paid no special attention to that, believing it was a mere tiredness. She proceeded with her work and practical driving lessons.

I insisted on her making an appointment with her doctor for a regular health check. I have had a bad dream a day before: I felt terrible pain and was conscious that it was Mara who had caused it. I started crying aloud and woke up benumbed. I never told her about the reason for that night horror.

On seventh of May, 1997 I took her to the clinic. Mara left the car, promised to dial me up when she was through, gave me a kind smile, waved her arm at me, and went… forever.

I couldn't wait for her at the hospital door because I had two boys –Taylor and Connor – with me in the car whom we were still patronizing then. When at home at last, I heard a telephone buzz: without any comprehendible explanations I was urgently summoned to the hospital.

I grasped the children and while coming out of the house I gave a look at the wall clock: it stopped. As I have determined later it occurred just at the moment of Mara's death. It may seem unbelievable, but it was so still: the clock was wound up to last for several days more.

I can't even imagine now how I managed to drive the car in that horrible premonition state. Pressing the steering wheel, with my eyes full with tears, I was praying, crying something – and the boys sitting at the back seats were trying to soothe me.

I was met in the emergency room. A doctor there was trying to explain something to me; I stood on trembling legs, I didn't believe, couldn't believe in what had happened. I was taken to some room where I saw… dead Mara.

Never had I experienced the greater horror. Scarcely an hour has elapsed since we were talking, joking, smiling, planning something. There were no signs of the upcoming nightmare.

Many years have elapsed since that time but still I can't recollect that horrible moment without shudder…

Later I was informed that she suddenly fell down at the registry and instantly died on the spot. Blood clot, thrombus has affected her heart.

She was fifty-seven.

The succeeding days passed in a daze. I received some injections, was made to swallow some sedative pills, to drink water. Some people were permanently around, I was never left alone, and both English and Russian were heard all the time. I was given food, was made to speak; they consoled me and… cried with me.

My memory keeps the main thing that dominated my mind then: it was not I who was to be pitied, I was pity for Mara. How it can be so, why it was not me who was much older than her – why it was she, why she was not meant to live, where is justice?! Where is God?! Is there anyone to set hopes upon, to whom pray, to expect mercy from? I was looking at the darkened sky through tears aware of the complete absence of anyone there and at the same time cursing Him.

Mara was buried at the Gan-Zikaron memorial cemetery, at the wide grassland in the Pacific coastal mountains. One will not find traditional monuments there. Only bronze tombstones designate the graves. The surrounding nature is the eternal monument to the dearest and closest people lost in eternity.

Funeral parlor where the coffin stood enclosed by heaps of flowers and wreaths could not accommodate all those who came to see her off on her final farewell journey; a wealth of people gathered outside. So many warm and kind words were said by those who attended the funeral ceremony!

The San-Mateo Mayor assured in his speech that a bench in commemoration of Mara would be installed in the central park of the town with a commemorative inscription. And the bench was soon installed. It is still there amidst the flowers and evergreen trees.

The funeral repast at Dima's apartment gathered a lot of people. It was not a mere observance of the mourning ritual. I remember that day; I remember those doleful songs performed by Mara's friend, a synagogue cantor who accompanied herself on guitar.

And once more – kind words, memories, grief. It was a sincere last farewell to a charming and, as many said repeatedly those days, extraordinary and bewitching woman in both American and Russian opinions – my wife Marina Rosenberg.

Her bronze tomb-place plate bears an inscription: "You left far too soon, used up like a luminous star, with your heart, love, and eternal grief staying with us".

We received many condolences from our relatives, friends, and acquaintances from America, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, and Hungary…

Following American tradition, friends and relatives have made donations to the universities and medical associations in memory of Mara. Inspired by our American friends, in Israel a memorial tree was planted. Obituary notices were published in Russian newspapers.

… I reserved a place neighboring Mara's for me.

Time never stops. Days, weeks passed, I remained alone and lived as if in gloom. I couldn't forgive myself – that couldn't keep her safe. I couldn't believe the doctors – I felt they were too slow in saving Mara.

I remember her paying little attention to her health. She was completely – up to her last day – engrossed in her work, in everything that surrounded her and what seemed of greater importance to her.

I hanged her large portraits around the apartment, used to write letters to her, and tape-recorded them. I sobbed like a child recollecting our whole thirty-year-long mutual life, rather hard but, as I now understood, a fortunate one.

Those sad days I was obsessed with a thought: what am I to do, should I name Dima's native mother, and wouldn't he be offended by the covered truth, would my revelation be worthy of Mara's memory. But I dared nevertheless: revealed the secret of Dima's birth to him considering that he was an adult man with a right to know that. He took in my information wisely, without particular emotions. He made me understand that he remembered, knew and loved a single mother, and all that had happened "before" was nothing else than his biographical fact.

Mara was always keen on verses, and from time to time, when already here in America, used to write rhymed congratulations to our friends. A month or two after her passing, while sorting out her papers and documents, I disclosed a verse that I was unaware of before. The poem stunned me – it must have been written not long before her death, foreboding it maybe:

When still alive – I was adverse
To tearful graveside orations,
Too late and empty, idle phrases
Meant to escort to a world inverse.
My dear friends, as you all know -
The whole days of my life through
I was an adept of life, though
I am a mortal, like you too.
What you will say over my body
Forever parting, solemn, sad –
Please, better say that – everybody –
To me alive, in need of that.
And flowers – to be abandoned
On my grave's knoll – and still alive,
You better give them to me now:
While we're together as beehive.
Speed up! Don't wait for thunder striking,
When you and him still breathe and live,
Express your tenderness and liking,
And all the love that you can give.

A year has passed in that semi-conscious state.

Loneliness is dreadful, especially after you have lost not a simply dear one, but a part of yourself.

Friends and children made everything to distract me, used to take me somewhere outside, never left me alone. They took pains to persuade me to change that mode of life, to spare myself.

In those difficult days, one of my close friends persuaded me in the necessity of some distraction and changing the environment. We visited together with him the mountain Lake Tahoe in Nevada, cruised the Caribbean islands. However, in those journeys I still felt guilty to Mara enjoying alone all that beauty having lost her.

I started coming to myself, made attempts to diversify my life. I feared staying alone with my thoughts and my grief further on.

It was quite natural for those who surrounded me to introduce me to different women in a try to help find one who could replace Mara. Naïve ones, they imagined that substitute possible.

The “girlfriends” started appearing in my life – the first one, another one… Neither feelings, nor affection, nor genuineness in our relations.

I saw and understood that they were driven by the sole wish “to arrange personal life”, to lean on somebody’s shoulder, and to have someone who will “serve a glass of water” in their hour of need.

Our friendly relations with Dina continued. During her guest stays in America she used to live in the neighboring town with her daughter’s family, taking trouble about me and helping me with everyday chores of a lone man. When she returned to Israel, we used to correspond and speak over the phone for long coming to know each other deeper and deeper. I started feeling she was the one who was in need of me and whom I also needed.

During her next arrival to America I invited her for a week-long trip to Hawaii. And there, in romantic environment, our relationship has entered a new phase. A month or two later I flew to Israel wherefrom we took a wonderful trip to Turkey.

…Further on there was Canada whereto Dina came to meet her relatives, and I flew to Toronto to meet her and stay with her. On receiving a green-card soon she bade farewell to Israel. I met her at San-Francisco airport and took to my place.

Never since we have parted. Dina became a part of my life; it is many years now that we have been together. And we both know it is forever.

Our apartment prominently displays Mara’s large portrait. She is so dear for us, and we honor her memory.

On November 10, 1998 Dima and Svetlana became parents of a son – my grandson. In Mara’s memory he was called Martin. He is the single seventh generation male descendant in the once numerous Rosenberg family.

I TREASURE ALL MY YEARS GONE

Turning old, people become obsessed with longing for travels – to view the places which owing to different reasons – work, child care, financial difficulties, “iron curtain”, etc. – they didn’t manage to see earlier.

I didn’t escape that desire too, and finding myself in America could implement it.

I tramped along the grand Washington and London; Champs Elysée and Montmartre in Paris; ancient ruins of Rome and Athens; was in raptures over the world masterpieces of Louvre and Prado museums; admired the super-modern architecture of Seoul and Tokyo. I can’t find words to describe fabulous Venice. Visited romantic Caribbean, Bahaman, and Hawaii islands. Thoroughly examined the sights of the biblical “cradle of mankind” – Israel. Walked the paths of the Alaskan legendary gold-diggers described by Jack London; admired the scenery of Colorado mountains and the skyscrapers of New York, “the capital of the world”.

I have seen countless things during the past years.

The unexpected discovery was the sight of the ancient Pompeii raised from the ashes. I couldn't surmise to see a fabulously preserved ancient city spreading against the majestic Vesuvius background. Leaving aside the tourist groups, deaf to the guide's words, I couldn't but think about the eternal, about "frailty of all things of earth".

I was also unaware of how the Great Wall of China looks like, though I read about it and saw photos of its fragments. But only while climbing along its innumerable steps I willy-nilly plunged into philosophic meditation.

Just like that my whole life was – step by step, with a trace or some life period on each one. And each tower like some crucial or tragic moment.

And with each step, like with each year, it is more and more difficult to ascend to reach the next tower – the summit with another ascent behind it… and up to the end like that – as long as vital force and will are sustained.

During the years of American life I visited Odessa several times, the last one in 2012. Met my friends and of course, visited my parents' grave. I don't know if I could ever visit that place, sacral for me, once again- I doubt that. Sad as it is, but long-distance voyages are too much for me.

Once, while in Odessa, together with Dima we were invited to the famous, former Soviet and now Russian satirist and humorist Michael Zhvanetsky with whom I studied once at the Maritime University in Odessa. He paid great attention to me and Dina. He owns a large beautiful house in Odessa (in Arcadia resort zone) where he uses to spend several summer months during his visits to Odessa from Moscow.

One of our tourist trips was to Prague, Vienna, and Budapest. In Budapest we had an interesting meeting with Ida Nemestothy's (Zigmund Rosenberg, my father's brother daughter) son Andrash and his wife Eve.

How I live to-day? As everyone at the fall of the leaf. I try to keep up my spirit, not to lose heart, and thanks God, am a rare visitor to doctors. Given the opportunity, I am not averse to drinking a couple glasses of wine, to dance youthfully, and am naively pleased when my associates doubt my real age feeling I am younger.

I spend long hours with computer using it for receiving prolific information and communicating with my far-off friends. Though they become lesser and lesser, however.

I was drastically impressed by my closest friend Korney Kapustin's death.

I meant to congratulate him with the oncoming New Year 2009, dialed him up many times – no answer. Fighting back bad presentiment I imagined he was at his country cottage: he admired skiing about the suburban Moscow forests. On my recent visit to Moscow I saw him strong and healthy. Until the latest days we communicated over the phone, exchanged opinions, memories, used to joke and tease each other.

By the end of January his daughter informed me from Moscow: "Father has suddenly got a stroke and passed at the end of December".

Not long ago I reread the book of his poems where there is a dedication to me. It was not until now that I realized that heavy foreboding Korney had writing the last lines:

A friend of yore

An olden friend from overseas,

To-day's American new native,
With Russia screened on his TVs
Just suddenly becomes its captive
And dials up…
We could unbosom ourselves
When dire straits were our burden,
To share hidden from all else
Our lives' advantages and ordeals.
We undergo life's strict pattern:
All of a sudden storm will come
And bring a news – a sound of ether –
That still alive is only one.
That means that you are left alone,
Not two of us as used to be.
Our joint past as if postponed
Regarded from the far-off beach.
With all my heart I wish you, brother,
My friend of yore, my bosom friend,
To live as long for one another
As circle of life for us is meant.

I used to like Moscow; at all times, even coming from America, tried to visit it. And largely because Korney lived there. With his death Moscow waned for me – never again I was there.

Travel bug lessened: I have seen enough, and it is difficult for me now. I feel it impossible to stay long-term flights and voyages.

I use sleeping pills regularly – no other way to have a night sleep.

Dreams have life of their own, but it is of different kind. Inconceivable, absolutely fantastic events take place there. I take no pains to perceive the human brain faculties that create those plots. I am always young in my dreams, never the one I am to-day.

How many people have passed through my life… Those with whom I came into contact – whether at work or in everyday life, through good or evil will, in happiness or in distress, people kind and evil, friends and foes, well-wishers and envious ones – can I really recollect all of them?

Many of them visit me in my sleep, even those who are long dead. In my night visions they are alive, they talk, participate in the events that never took place in real life and in the places I have never visited, but I participate in what is going on as if in fantastic film.

It happens that my wives – Julia, Rosita, Marina – visit me in my dreams, but they are featureless. Waking up, I try to guess who was there in the plot created by the night memory – but to no effect.

The most often visitor in my dreams is my mother. She seems alive but somewhere far away and missing me greatly, and I am tormented by the thought that do not give her all the attention she needs.

And I seem to hear her voice once more, "…be happy forever, my son!"

What a beautiful life people would have if mother's wishes could come true!

IN LIEU OF EPILOGUE

Many decades ago, in 1948 I finished school in Chernigov*. At the prom night the headmaster, who was our Russian literature teacher also, congratulated me and said that my notebook with school compositions would be exposed in the school museum. On my visit to school several years later I made sure it was there.

The front page bore the image of Russian classic legendary character – Danko with his burning heart in his hands. That picture was a symbol of the path into the "bright future" ready to be opened for me.

As a graduation present from my mom, I received a book "Gadfly" by Ethel-Lillian Voinich with mom's inscribed words I remembered forever: "Let your destiny protect you from hard ordeals".

I feel that for many people who do not believe in God destiny stands for His role in their lives. The same is with me: when speaking here about tragic and sad periods of my life I mentioned God sometimes ironically, sometimes with biting sarcasm. I must have been driven by a naïve wish to diversify monotony of my biographical memoirs style with that literary touch.

As a matter of fact, I never believed in God, and still don't believe in Him for one reason: if He really existed and possessed all faculties people allotted Him – He would debar all those disasters and heart-breaks on Earth. He must have prevented all those tragic events in my life, untimely losses of the most close and native people.

I permanently ask myself one and the same question: whether I lived correct life, had I not committed – consciously or unconsciously – some acts that were to be punished by my fate, had I not broken notorious Godly or human commandments?

And my answer is: no, never broke commandments – didn't kill, didn't rob, didn't swindle… no, no and no (if only a little – and who is without sin?).
I lived honest life, and if harm was done – well, to myself only, never to my fellow creatures.

And another eternal question: what is my faith? A person can't live without it. To find an answer I address my memory once more.

I see ancient Jerusalem. A grey-bearded old man stands beside the Whaling Wall in the crowd of worshippers. Into the slot between the stones he inserts a clumsily handwritten note: "My Lord! Don't punish me anymore.
There is nothing to it. Spare me. Show mercy to my son, to his family, to my grandchildren. Let them never undergo ordeals You have given me. I beg You!"

Looking closely into the old man's face I recognize myself as I am to-day, only many decades older than an exalted lad as I was at the beginning of my narration, who couldn't foresee what was ahead of him.

Years went by, and to-day I live in my future, on the threshold of my 85th anniversary, and am looking forward to having my further life roadway straight, without hairpins, ruts, and potholes that will prevent me from committing fatal transgressions.

What for and for whom have I written this book, expending my time and efforts to tell about times and events already foreign and uninteresting for the to-day's generation, leaving aside the future ones?
The only one right answer would be – for me and now, as long as memory keeps. To live it all over and over again.
But still there is a tiny hope that someone will sometime become suddenly interested in that my first and the last confession.
Thus I have written my to-day's, now extra-scholastic free essay with my own person as a leading character.
For a long period I was at a loss without a slightest idea how to conclude my narration.
And salvage came: I decided to leave all as it is, without ending: the life still goes on, isn't it?
Let anyone who will be after me – my son or grandson – having read this book supplement it with some (I hope, they will be kind) words dedicated to their close or far ancestor, and… put a stop.
……
……
……. .

MY FAMILY TREE

Father's line

My great-great-grandfather Isaac Rosenberg was born in the second half of the 18th century.

His ancestors – natives of Germany – fled from the 17th-18th century persecutions to seek refuge in Poland, and then in Ukraine.

He lived with his family in a South Ukraine Jewish settlement (supposedly, to-day's Vinnitsa Region).

No other information on him is available.

Great-grandfather Naftul Isaakovich Rosenberg (1812-1900).

In 1827, following the czar Nicolay I ordinance on natural conscription for Jews, at the age of 15 he was enlisted to the military school under the dominance of drill and severe physical conditions. The lots of underage recruits who became “the czar’s soldiers” were dramatic and trying.

He was made to be baptized and accept Christianity. At the age of 18, he was put to the regular army military service where he served as a recruit for twenty-five years (1830-1855).

He took part in the Crimean (1853-1856) and other wars. For courage and bravery, he was awarded the two crosses of St. George and a medal “For Faith and Loyalty” due to which he was equated later on to the gentry.

When retired, he returned to Judaism, and used to live in the central part of Russia (the “czar’s soldiers” were allowed to live out of the “lace of settlement”, Moscow and St.-Petersburg included). “The lace of settlement” meant a statutory provision stipulating that Jews were allowed to reside only in the strictly specified provinces.

He married in 1852 (soldiers-recruits had the right to marry during their military service). Name of his wife was Ita (no other information is available).

He had two children – Yefrem (1853-1920) and Ishiya (?).

According to his contemporaries, the “czar’s soldiers” were courageous and vigorous warriors devoted to faith, czar, and homeland. My grandchildren – Nicole and Martin Rosenberg – are direct descendants of one of them – Naftul Isaakovich Rosenberg.

Yefrem Naftulovich Rosenberg is my grandfather.

Owing to his father’s benefits for the 25 years long military service in the czarist army, he received good education and was raised to a high position in the Railroad Department.

He had nine children born between 1887 and 1905. Some their tragic lives are presented in the book.

1 Esfir Rosenberg (born 1887) – a teacher – together with her husband A. Melamis was killed in 1941.
2. Elisabeth Rosenberg (born 1892) – a doctor’s assistant, killed in 1941.
3. Betty Rosenberg (born 1895) – a dentist – killed with her whole family: husband Michael Dekhtyar and daughter Lyubov (born 1937) in 1941.
4. Riva Rosenberg (born 1900) – pharmacist, killed in 1941.
5. Moseys Rosenberg (born 1898) – a lawyer, died in 1939. His wife Ida and son Zyama were killed by Nazis in 1941.
6. Sigizmund Rosenberg (1889-1970).

On the eve of the WWI he joined the undercover revolutionary-terroristic organization. He was arrested and sentenced to death. His mother (my grandmother Sara Rosenberg) managed to win the support of the Empress in her plea to czar to save her son’s life. Russian czar Nicolay II substituted the death sentence for the eternal penal servitude, and Sigizmund was exiled to Siberia. In 1914, at the onset of WWI, he was sent to the frontline as a member of a penal battalion. As a captive, he found himself in Hungary. Participated in revolutionary activity and creation of a short-lived Soviet power there. In 1918 he married a Hungarian Ethel Klein (1887-1966) and settled in Hungary for good.

Sigizmund and Ethel had two children:

Ida Rosenberg (1920? -), married name Nemeshtoty.

Tibor Rosenberg-Regesh (1922-1977).

Ida's husband – Layosh Nemeshtoty (born 1915? -)
Ida and Layosh's son – Andrash Nemeshtoty (born 1941); his wife – Eva Bitshkei (born 1936).
Andrash and Eva have two children:
Daughter Andrea (born 1971);
Son Zoltan (born 1974).
Tibor's wife – Maria Bobchinetskaya (1923-1975).
Tibor's and Maria's daughter – Paulina (born 1944). Her husband was Rudolf Kovach.
Paulina's and Rudolf's son – Victor. Information on this family is unavailable.

It was due to Paulina that we became aware of the Hungarian branch in our family in the post-Stalin period when the "iron curtain" became unsteady and availability of relatives abroad was not to be condemned. Together with Mara and Dima we visited Ida, Tibor, Andrash in Hungary several times.

Ida's husband Layosh Nemeshtoty, a descendant of a rich Hungarian family (his father was a large landowner), in the post-war Socialist Hungary was deprived of all his wealth and worked as a regular agriculturist.

During WWII the family remained safe: they managed to hide themselves in the Hungarian division train where Ida's husband Layosh, a Hungarian, was at service; they were lucky to be not given away to the Germans (Hungarian Jews were known to be severely exterminated).

Ida told me about those events in detail, but I regret remembering them only in part; and her children, especially grandchildren, are absolutely unaware of that. Quite recently Ida's grandson has sent me a 1945 photo where Sigizmund is presented together with the Soviet and American officers; unfortunately, he could explain nothing.

Ida has made a serious social and political career. She was a member of the Hungarian Socialist party (analogous to the CPSU*) and occupied eminent positions in the Hungarian People's Republic government.

For several years (during the period we used to meet) she represented Hungary in the COMECON*, analog to EEC (European Economic Community), in Moscow. Partly it became possible due to her splendid education and brilliant Russian, made habitual through her father Sigizmund Rosenberg. She was an often leader of the Hungarian party delegations going abroad (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, etc.). Similar mission has brought her once to Odessa and she stayed with us.

Time went by, Ida and Layosh have passed. But we never lost connections with Andrash, Eva and their children – Andrea and Zoltan; we used to meet them on our way from America and do not lose contact until to-day.

By the way, after the collapse of socialism Andrash managed to receive his heritage back, and to-day he is a wealthy landowner.

Photo of my father I have got owing to Ida who presented it to me. That photo was sent by him in 1928 with inscription: "A keepsake to brother Zigmund from David". The blood brothers David and Zigmund have not met since early childhood.

7. David Rosenberg (1903-1940) – my father. I recounted his life in the initial chapters of my book.

8. Solomon Rosenberg (1905-1995). Was a private at the beginning of the WWII. Was raised to officer during the war. Took part in numerous battles – from defense of Moscow to capture of

Konigsberg (Germany) in 1945. Served in the land and naval units. Retired ranked lieutenant colonel in 1960.
A vital factor worth noting: the brothers are tied up by dual kinship. They married about the same time: Solomon married Manya Maidenberg in 1927, and in 1928 my father David married Frida Balaban, a daughter of Molka Maidenberg, Manya's sister (i.e. my mother is a niece of Solomon's wife). The Rosenbergs' and Maidenbergs' family lines have met twice: thus, for instance Lidia (Solomon's and Manya's daughter) is my cousin on father's side and my aunt on mother's side.

After Manys's death in 1971 Solomon has remarried and died in Odessa aged 90 in 1995. Solomon had two children: David and Lidiya.
David (Danya) Rosenberg, once a dashing artillery officer who had graduated from the Odessa Military Institute, spent 25 years in military service at the Sakhalin Island (Far East of the former Soviet Union, now Russia). Retired ranked lieutenant colonel and moved to Palanga (Lithuania), wherefrom emigrated to Israel. His son Yevgeniy with his family was already there.
Years have passed, and to-day David and his wife Rita are chronic invalids in the hospital for elderly patients, almost unsusceptible to what is happening around them.
Danya and I are the only male representatives of the fifth generation Rosenbergs.
Lidiya Brener (Solomon's daughter) with her husband Konstantin live in New York. They are aged people now, not very healthy, but they try to keep up their spirits as high as it is possible in their age, and don't give up. Their son Viktor Brenner lives with them.
Danya's son – Yevgeniy Rosenberg – lives and works in Israel. He has two daughters.
9. Rosalie Rosenberg – married name Vyazovskaya. Her husband Isaac Markovich Vyazovskiy is an enterprising catering engineer with a good head on his shoulders. They have always lived in Odessa, save war time which they spent in Nizhne-Angarsk at the Baikal* Lakeside. There Isaac was a chief engineer of the tinned food factory evacuated from Odessa. Rosalie (Ruzya) was always a housewife who was engaged in both apartment and summer cottage housekeeping and bringing up two children – Mark and Lyudmila.

Their son Mark Vyazovsky is my cousin, his wife is Svetlana.
They were childless many years. In the mid-1970s they have adopted two newly-burns – a boy and a girl – and dedicated their lives to them.

Mark died in 2003. Svetlana still lives in Odessa.

The Vyazovskys' daughter Lyudmila Prizand is my cousin. Her husband Michael Prizand died in Odessa. Lyudmila has emigrated to America with her son Alexander. She lives in Boston.

The author whose life story is presented in this book is me – Efim Rosenberg, David's son.

My son David (Vadim) Rosenberg (his relatives and friends are more accustomed to his name Dima) was born in Baku in 1964. Since 1968 lived in Odessa. Emigrated to the USA in 1989.
His wife is Svetlana (nee Tsargorodskaya).
Their children (my grandchildren):

Daughter Nicole (Nika). Was born in Vienna (Austria) in 1989 on their out-migration way. Graduated from the university, lives in San-Francisco.

Son Martin (born 1998), a schoolboy. Name Martin was given in the memory of my late wife Mara who died tragically in 1997.

Dima and his family reside in the neighboring township Foster-City.
The foregoing narration makes it clear that family and surname Rosenberg have closed on the only male representative of his own (the seventh) generation – Martin Rosenberg. Let his fate be kind to him and protect him from tough ordeals his grandfather had to go through.
Mother of my second wife Rosita (Dima's biological mother) – Mikaela Leibman (married name Katz) descended from a notorious Georgian* Jewish family. A well-known 20th century French woman-writer Elsa Triolé (the author of the "Nylon Era" and other novels) also descended from that family. Indirect kinship can be traced to a famous Russian singer Fyodor Shalyapin.
The connections with that family were broken due to the reasons explained in the book. I guess many of its members are in America, it must not be too difficult to trace their whereabouts.
Mara's parents have passed. I would like to mention particularly her father – Ilya Grigorievich Miltzman who has lived a long honest life. A man who never acted against his conscience, never made a compromise, lived in all honesty. Went through the war from its first to its last day. Was awarded numerously. After the war was left in the army. Retired ranked lieutenant colonel.
By the end of his life in Israel he became an observant Jew and held Judaism sacred.
He seems to be the last of the Miltzman family. All his numerous family were exterminated by the Nazis in Odessa in 1941 – the whole 18 of them – parents, brothers, sisters, and others of kin.
I remember the only one Miltzman family after-war survivor – his uncle Alexander Miltzman. Internet keeps information on him, a person with intriguing destiny. In the pre-war times he was a Communist Party official; lived and worked in Odessa. As a war participant was captured by the Nazis. They were known to exterminate all Jews whom they have captured. Having an appearance without prominent Jewish features he disguised himself as an Asian – and was left alive. He was lucky to set himself free and find a partisan detachment. He became its commander and led manful fights with the fascists. He was awarded numerous orders and medals. He wrote and published his memoires. His name is cited in many books and documents on partisan movement in the 1941-1945 war. During the post-war period he was a popular and respected person. His name and heroic deeds are available through Internet.
But with the passing years everything has gradually slipped out of people's memory; new generation has come inquisitive to the heroes of the long past days, thus sending them into oblivion.

Mother's line

Long ago our forefather lived in the German town of Magdeburg. To all appearance fleeing from the persecutions, they came to settle themselves with masses of other wandering Jews in Ukraine.
The family progenitor was Solomon bar Meir Isaac Maidenberg (1860-1939). He was born in Bessarabia (under the Romanian ruling then), Pale. Died in Dzigovka (Southern Ukraine).
His wife Pearl Deborah Maidenberg, nee Rizher (1865-1941). Was born in Bessarabia. Died in Beltsy (Moldavia).
Solomon and Pearl had 7 children – 2 sons and 5 daughters:

1. Molka Maidenberg (married name Balaban) (1881-1941); her husband Eliyahu (Elly) Balaban (1880-1941).

Their children: Frida Balaban, married name Rosenberg (1912-1981) – my mother; Rachel (1928-1941);

Shimon (1904-1994).

My grandparents together with their daughter Rachel were killed by the Nazis.
Shimon has fled from Ukraine in 1926 to Palestine where he assumed new surname – Barlev. Took active part in the liberating struggle for independence and creation of Israeli State. Parted from her brother since 1926 without any news on him, my mother lost all hopes for seeing him one day. She did not know whether he was alive. However, in 1963 a miracle happened: my mother received a photo telegram from Shimon 's wife Lyuba who was touring the Soviet Union those days; it was a short message that Shimon was alive and living in Israel in good health. It contained also Shimon's photo. Immediately after that we took a flight from Baku where we resided then to Odessa where Lyuba had appointed our meeting – at her native brother David Shkolnik's.
She told us about absolutely fantastic Shimon's life. It was a story we could not have heard being separated by an "iron curtain".
In 1966 Shimon came from Israel to Odessa. It was a meeting of brother and sister after forty years, an acme of their happiness. They never parted for a week and a half. It was their single meeting. During many successive years, up to my mother's death, they were corresponding with each other.
Here I will just note that it was due to Shimon that in 1926 an Israeli family branch has appeared. We used to meet Shimon and his wife Lyuba, together with their three sons (Uri – a pilot, Dan – a lawyer, Gileh – an architect), both in Odessa and Israel.
Unfortunately, after Shimon's death our contacts appeared cut short.
2. Goldeh Maidenberg (1883-1918). No information on her and her family is available. Only her son Golya (1918-1941) is known to be killed by the German (or Latvian) fascists in 1941 in Latvia.
3. Elken Maidenberg (1892-1973) – married name Perelman. Her husband – Melekh Perelroizen (1892-1948).
They had two daughters – Faina (1920-1998)

Dora (1924-2007).

In 1941 Faina graduated from the medical institute. In June of that same year a war with the fascist Germany has started, and she was enlisted as a military doctor-surgeon to the front-line forces. While at the front, she married a medical officer Alex Shamachmudov (of Uzbek* origin). When she became pregnant – went home, to Chernigov, where her daughter Lyudmila (Lyuda) was born in 1944. After the war was over, she got a divorce. Alex returned to Uzbekistan where he lived later on.

Lyuda lives in Chernigov to this day. She is a musical college graduate. She married Herman Huseed.

To-day Lyuda is an invalid who gets about on crutches, but she still teaches music in the musical college. Herman died in 1970.

Lyuda and Herman's daughter is Julia Gorbunova. She lives in Moscow. She was married to a Gorbunov, but divorced him. Julia is a well-known scientist in the field of chemistry, Professor, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the State prize of Russia laureate. Abundant information on her is available through Internet.

Faina's sister Dora (1924-2007) has married a widowed Colonel Aleksey Perov who had 2 children left by his late wife.

Dora and Aleksey Perovs' son – Michael Perov – also lives in Moscow. In April 2009 he was our guest in San Mateo.

4. David Maidenberg (1884-1949) – emigrated to the United States in 1905. David's wife is Rosa Vinokur (1885-1969).

They had four sons: Meyer (1907-1982); Ben (1910-1986); Milton (1912-1996) and Franck (1914-2012).

Milton's wife is Irma Valinet (1915-2009). Their children: Toby (born 1941); Michael (born 1942), and Reed (born 1948).

Michael's wife is Catherine (Kitty), born 1944. Michael and Kitty have three sons: Joseph (born 1973); Ted (born 1974), and Daniel (born 1977).

Reed's wife is Sarah Gevirtz (born 1966). Reed' and Sarah's daughter Emma Rose was born in 1995.

Detailed information on the numerous Maidenberg family is available through the Michael Maidenberg documents (see Appendices).

5. Joseph (1885-1971). His wife was Sarah Blecher (1885-1964). Their son was Amnon. We were in contact with Amnon who lived in Kishinev* until our departure to America. An amiable, highly educated person. He has gathered and sent later to the USA prolific information on the Maidenberg family members who still lived in Ukraine, and about all their fates. He described everything in the letters addressed to Michael (Milton's son) and me. His latest years he spent as a school teacher.

Amnon's son Edward (born 1960) is a gifted and notorious artist. Information on him is available through Internet.

6. Esther Maidenberg – with husband Morris Perelrozen and daughter Sylvia emigrated in 1926 from Ukraine to Canada, wherefrom moved to the United States. They had three children: Sylvia (1923-2008); David Rozen (1926-1981); Goldie (born 1931).

7. Malieh-Manya (1902-1981) (married name Rosenberg, Solomon's wife). Their children: David (1928), Lidiya (1932).

The most detailed research of the Maidenbergs' pedigree was made here in America by Michael (David's grandson and Milton's son). In 1992 he assigned Professor Miriam Vainer, a genealogy expert, to go to Ukraine and trace back the origins and genealogy of the Maidenbergs. Later on she published a unique book about that.

Several years later Michael himself made an expedition. He visited many cities and villages in Ukraine and Moldavia: was in Odessa, Chernigov, Kishinev, etc. Met relatives still residing in those places, visited burial sites of the family ancestors. On returning home he made a film about his trip.

*My family tree – Rozenberg (on father's side) and Maidenberg (on mother's side) is presented in Supplement.
*Militia – law enforcement units, in the Soviet Union the same as police.
*echelon – a special train for transporting large quantities of people in war-time. Consisted of cars used for cattle or cargo.
*front – hostilities zone. Generally used to stand for "war".
*Payok – strictly rationed quantities of food .
* Caravan – a succession of camels moving one after another; a camelcade.
* Kolkhoz - forcibly established agricultural cooperatives with socialization of their privately-owned land and livestock, a collective-farm .
*The reader of the present story, living in another country and in other times cannot but be puzzled by great number of the stropped ("--") words and expressions.
My narration is specific for its irony, sometimes sarcasm, mockery that imply official use of those terms in the depicted times in media, in reports and speeches of Soviet ideologists, in our socialist vocabulary.
*KGB – the state security organ (structure) .
*ogorod – a small lot of land at the outskirts of a city granted to a townsman for growing vegetables for his own needs situation.
* Stepan Bandera – the head of the Ukrainian nationalists in Western Ukraine
*OUN – Organized Ukrainian Nationalists - actively participated in the war on Nazi side
*In the Soviet Union the 5th point in personnel questionnaires stood for ethnicity.
* CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
* COMECON – Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
*Baikal – a huge lake in South Siberia (Russia), the deepest lake in the world
*Georgia – one of the 15 republics constituting the former Soviet Union; now an independent State.
*Uzbek – a native of the Central Asian republic Uzbekistan, one of the 15 republics constituting the former Soviet Union
*Kishinev – a capital of Moldavia (former Bessarabia), one of the 15 republics constituting the former Soviet Union
*Sovkhoz – a state-owned agricultural enterprise in contrast to kolkhoz – a farmers-owned collective agricultural enterprise
* Military registration and enlistment office – in the Soviet Union, alike all other times, universal service existed
*A town in provincial Ukraine (one of the 15 republics constituting the former Soviet Union)
*OVIR -Department for Visas and Registrations of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of the USSR – where the exit papers had to be legalized