

**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**  
**The Soviet Jewish Oral History Project of the Women's Auxiliary**  
**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**LAZAR A.**

**VETERINARIAN**  
**Veterinary Institute of Alma-Ata**

BIRTH: August 1921, Odessa

SPOUSE: Inda A.  
1921, Dunaevtsa

CHILDREN: Anatoly, 1954

PARENTS: Simon A., 1884-194?, Balta, docks worker  
Anna S.A., 1884-1968, Balta

SIBLINGS: Sarah A.  
Anya A.

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

Sarah and Anya were my sisters. One was older, the other younger than I. They are in Russia today. Until the War began we lived together. My mother was not working. My father was a worker at the docks. Life was hard. There wasn't enough food in Russia in 1921, when I was born. In 1933 and 1937 many people died for lack of food. We ate sunflower seeds and the husks leftover from the seeds after the oil was pressed from them. The husk of the seeds was used in the bread. In 1921, when I was six months old and Odessa was between riots and government power was gone, we lived near the market and someone tossed a grenade and two fragments lodged in my head. I was operated on and they were removed. I still have the scars.

### **I Remember My Grandparents**

I remember my grandparents. My earliest memories-- I remember life was hard, that there wasn't enough to eat. My grandmother's name was Chana and my grandfather was Boruch. I think even then the family name was "A." They lived in the town of Ananev in the Odessa region. My grandfather was a glazier. They did not live with us. My father was religious. He went to synagogue, laid *tefillin* and observed the Jewish holidays. I went with my father and I went to a Jewish school until it closed. I was about eight, and in the second grade. I remember when I was very small they hid

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the matzah on Pesach and gave us presents. It was kosher in the home and there were different dishes for the foods.

From childhood I knew that there were *pogroms* from my parents and grandparents, that it wasn't a good thing to be Jewish. I remember the word "Jew" was unpleasant when they said it. Everybody tried to hide it. During school years I had Russian and Jewish friends. During childhood kids don't speak a lot about it, but when I got older it was different.

When I was eighteen years old I had my first problem after finishing high school when I tried to enter institute.

### **Joining a Workers' Faculty**

I liked animals and decided when I was young I would like to work with them. In Russia there were worker faculties. Before you apply to enter the institute, if you have finished this faculty as a worker, it's easier for you to enter the institute. So I went to the worker faculty because it was the only way to get a higher education. It was 1939. I was at the faculty of the Agriculture Institute, the same Institute I wanted to enter. It wasn't far from my house.....

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They made things from wood or metal. I started working in small workshops, helping the worker. Like in a shop here. I was sixteen and I did what I was told to do, a helper. This made it possible for me to enter the faculty.

Because I had to be a worker to enter the faculty, I went to work in the morning until four and from six I went to this faculty for two years for evening study. You had to be a worker to get higher education. In 1939 when I was eighteen I entered. It was because most young people like myself couldn't afford to study. They had to work in the morning and study in the evening. It wasn't just because I was Jewish. But for Jews it was the only way. It was very difficult to enter the Institute without these two years. At the Agriculture Institute there were very few Jews. There were twenty students in my group, which was not the full faculty and more than half were Jewish. But some of these students got just a ten-year education, like an elementary school education because they couldn't study before and they had to work for a living. That's why it was so hard to get the original education, the ten years of elementary education. It's like the end of elementary, the begin-

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ning of secondary school. Most of them don't enter the institute after that.

There were two organizations we could have joined, the professional union and Komsomol, the communist youth organization. As a Jew I couldn't join Komsomol but I joined the professional organization. After the two years, I was able to enter the veterinarian program without taking entrance exams. It was 1939 and it wasn't as large a problem for Jews to enter. I was in school when the war broke out.

#### **Relocated in Alma-Ata When War Begins**

When the war started the Institute closed and was relocated in Alma-Ata, which is in the far east of Russia. My father, a dockworker, had to do war work and wasn't permitted to leave Odessa. My older sister, Anya was a family doctor and served in the army at that time. They knew that the war was starting and many people were taken, especially doctors. When the war broke out she was already in the army, in Dombas in the middle part of Russia. I and my small sister and my mother were evacuated by ship, a coal ship, which was dirty, and it was uncomfortable, lacking

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rooms and places to sleep, but it was our only means for leaving Odessa.

It was very dangerous because there were German submarines in the Black Sea and planes were dropping bombs. It was very unpleasant and from there we entered the Asoskoje Sea and we switched from the ship to a train. My mother was evacuated with my sister to Tashkent. I went to Alma-Ata. It was the beginning of September when we started our evacuation. The people from Moldavia, which was further west and already occupied by the Germans, came and said that they were killing Jews. Most of the Jews tried to escape, but some that didn't believe it was the nature of the Germans to kill Jews stayed and were killed. My cousin and I myself talked to people who escaped from Moldavia who left everything. It was very difficult to leave Odessa but my father had a seaport I.D. and that's why the family was able to take the ship and leave. I think that more Jews would have been able to escape but those Jews who remembered 1918 when the Germans came in the first World War-- they couldn't believe that the same people would kill. They remembered them being more tolerant than the Russians. That's why most of them stayed and whoever stayed was killed.

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### **Education and Deprivations of Daily Life in Alma-Ata**

The evacuation was very difficult because we had nothing. Like now, we left everything and came without anything. Life was very hard, a struggle. Kazakhstan (Alma-Ata is the capital) had its own agricultural institute and this is where we came. The two institutes were connected to each other. We studied in Russian, the national language, and in part the professors from Odessa continued to teach us. The professors from Kazakhstan taught us too. Out of twenty, five from our group came to Alma-Ata.

There was nothing to put on, no shoes, no pants, nothing to eat. They fed us once a day a soup which consisted mostly of water and some pickles and two or three kernels of corn. Bread was rationed to 400 grams a day. You had to have a card. Students had a card but had to work at night to keep it. On the black market I could have got something but it was too expensive. Nobody could afford it. A pint of milk cost a month's salary. I worked at night at a large meat warehouse. They made a broth from the meat and we got to eat some. We didn't get money.

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In summer I went to the small villages nearby, working as a veterinarian, and I was able to get food for my family, flour, rice-- for my sister and mother.

The Institute and the medical students' dormitory were very close. Odessa medical school was relocated here also.

### **We Meet and Marry**

We all went together to go dancing and spend time. Inda had gone to medical school in Kiev but she came to Alma-Ata from Novosibersk. My friends from Odessa who were students at the medical school introduced me to Inda.

In my room there were ten students living with me. Inda came and I had torn pants and I lay under the blanket and she sewed them for me because I couldn't go out that way. I just fell in love and after that I got married.

The wedding was in her room and with friends and she had a little money and I had a little money and we made a marriage. It was a civil marriage. You have to pay money



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for the two stamps which are like a marriage license, but when she went to buy the stamps they were out of them. We couldn't make the marriage legal without these stamps. I then went to the bank to buy the stamps. It was summer and it gets very hot in Alma-Ata. After I bought the stamps, I folded them together and because of the heat they stuck together. And when I brought them to the official in charge she said it wasn't enough, that we needed two. We had no more money to buy more. Somehow we took them apart and got married. There was no money for a wedding trip. Inda was in the last year of study when we got married. I had two more years.

I didn't have to serve in the army during the war because the students of every cultural institute had the required card that they didn't have to go to war. But I had a heart problem and didn't have to serve anyway.

Even after we got married in 1943, Inda continued to live in her place and I in mine.

When she finished school, because she was a doctor, they refused to let her stay with me and they sent her to

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the European front which had been liberated from Germany because there was a need for doctors. At the beginning of 1944 she left Alma-Ata and went to Moscow, the Ukraine and Moldavia. In 1945 when I finished my education, they sent me to the Ukraine and I went to Odessa. Eventually she was able to come to Odessa too after the war in 1946. But we were close to each other and were able to travel to see each other, she in Moldavia and I in Odessa. though she worked and I had to stay there.

#### **Living Conditions in Odessa after the War**

At first we didn't have a place of our own and stayed in my mother's house. After the war living conditions were very difficult. We had no place, no apartment, we had no opportunity to have children. I worked in the Odessa region so I was never home. Most of the time I was in different places. I took the train and when I came to the village station I was met by a horse and the people who needed me. I received a salary and expenses for the trip. Less than one hundred days a year I was home. There were no roads, it was dirty and muddy there. But in the villages I was able to buy food.

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I gave immunizations to cows and horses and treated diseases when they called for help from the large city. In the villages they had no doctors to help them. I would go to help if there had been an outbreak of disease. They would call and I would go. They would meet me and I organized the treatment for the animals: chickens, cows, horses, pigs, or sheep. For twenty years I worked like this. In the city there are no farms and no work of this kind.

During the war my father died. He was working near an army airport and was killed during bombing. My mother was living with her younger sister in Odessa when she died at the age of 84.

I worked as a veterinarian until 1965 and even after that I traveled to the villages until recent years. Odessa was a city of a million. In the smaller cities where they didn't have as many experts in my field, I eventually worked more as an inspector than a doctor.

**Forbidden Matzah**

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I tried to pass on Jewish traditions and Jewish religion to my son Anatoly. There were no Jewish books and I didn't read Hebrew. There was no Torah and there was no teaching of religious books but because my parents and his mother's parents were religious, we talked about his grandparents to him and the traditions. We celebrated the Jewish holidays as well as we could in Russia. On Pesach we got matzah every year and also celebrated Purim and some general holidays. There was a time when it was forbidden to have matzah and we tried to get it from "underground." Sometimes I took him to synagogue but it was dangerous because you could lose your job if you went to synagogue.

### **Chernobyl and Glasnost**

We just had some information about the disaster at Chernobyl. We couldn't do anything. We just knew it happened. We didn't know what happened and only now it's become more clear. It was near Kiev not Odessa and nobody in Odessa was much concerned about it.

Before *glasnost* I didn't hear of any Jewish religious teaching, but after *glasnost* they started talking about it

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and meeting together in a synagogue and they made small demonstrations for Jewish education. I even took part twice. Before, if somebody knew that someone taught Hebrew he could be brought to court. And only the people who wanted to go to Israel tried to study Hebrew underground. In Odessa there were only two or three people who knew Hebrew.

I was interested in Jewish education and organization of schools for Jews. In the last five years because of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* people were able to leave the country more and speak more openly.

After *glasnost* I didn't really learn anything I hadn't already known. We knew most of the information but were afraid to speak of it. We knew if we said something wrong we would disappear.

### **No Reason to Remain**

When Anatoly and Lia left with their family there was no reason for us to remain. It might have been better for Inda and me to go to Israel but because the children came

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here, we did too. I left Odessa with nothing. Photographs were left with my daughter-in-law's father.

We have friends in Israel. There will be a time when all Jews here in the United States will go to Israel. Anti-Semitism here will go up. I read newspapers published in the United States, in New York-- in Russian in which there are a lot of articles. They are making fascist signs on synagogues here just like in Russia. It's a little now but can grow.

### **Family Closeness**

We were family of the same blood around our mother, because the mother is the beginning of the family. She is the mother and loves her children and tries to keep them together. When they are grown up, they have their own families but they join together in their mother's home. I think all families stay together because of children and grandchildren and warm feelings toward each other, even though every member of the family has a different character and different ways, some good or some bad. But they keep together because they are family. We love the children.

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I hope that though now it's hard, the children will work hard and they will reach what they have to reach and will be able to give their own kids an education. That the whole family will be healthy and wealthy and things will get better. And we the grandparents have decided to devote ourselves to the kids. We will give Anatoly and Lia the opportunity to study to become eligible for medical residencies and instead of them we will be with the kids.

Life consists of small events and there are many of them.