

**RG-50.405.0006**

**Oral history interview with Izrail Bersutsky**

**Summary**

Izrail Bersutsky, born in 1929 in Kotujany, near Kishinev (Chisinau, Moldova) in the province of Moldavia; until 1940, Moldavia was part of Romania, then it became part of the Soviet Union; his father, David Bersutsky (1903-1985), had a business selling fur pelts, which he brought from fur trappers; at age five, Izrail went to Jewish school; he was the oldest and had one brother and two sisters; after school, Izrail and his siblings helped his parents by bringing water from the lake to their home; his father made a good living until 1940, when the Soviet Union took over Moldavia; then, all private businesses were taken over and the Jewish schools and synagogues were closed; while his father still worked in the fur business, his earnings now went to the government; when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Izrail, his mother, Leah Bersutsky (1903-1972), and his siblings left Kotujany and went as far as the River Dnesta in Moldavia, where a ghetto camp was created; most of the people who stayed in the ghetto were killed by German bombings; Izrail, his mother and siblings escaped to Uzbekistan; Izrail's father was sent to Siberia to a "work front" on a construction project; in Uzbekistan, Izrail, his mother and his siblings lived for three years in Shorechan and then in Fergana for two years; all they took with them were the clothes they wore when they left; they had no money; both Izrail and his mother worked; Izrail worked for 18 hours a day on a small farm gathering cotton and grain; for food, they were given 400 grams of brown bread per person a day; they lived in a one room clay hut, with no electricity or water; for water, they carried polluted water from the river; they slept on hay on a dirt floor; because of a shortage of food and a lack of medicine, people died daily; they were not able to observe Jewish holidays and traditions; after the war ended, in 1946, Izrail's father joined the family; they went back to Kotujany; their home had been damaged during the war by the German soldiers, but they re-built the home; after the war, only about 100 Kotujany Jews had survived; synagogues and Jewish schools remained closed; Izrail worked during the day in a produce warehouse and went to night school; because Izrail's father was no longer able to work as hard, as he had suffered from malaria during the war, Izrail became the main family support; at age 22, Izrail graduated from high school; afterwards he moved to Kishinev and at age 30 he got a Bachelor's Degree from Technical College; he then worked as a manager in a government owned food market; he later got a Master's Degree in economics; Izrail's brother and sisters later moved to Kishinev; even though Izrail had these degrees, the Communist Party did not make opportunities available to Jews, as Jews were not permitted to achieve high positions; in 1961, when he was 33, Izrail met his future wife, Frida Braunshtein, age 26; Frida was an electrical engineer; Frida's uncle introduced them; Frida was from a religious family, her father was a rabbi; while Kishinev was a small city, there was still a synagogue; even though Izrail was a trained economist, as a Jew, he could not obtain a position in that field; in Kishinev, Izrail worked in a small college, the Cooperative Technicum, teaching food processing; in 1973, Izrail's brother, Chaim, moved to Israel; the Soviet government permitted Chaim to emigrate because he did not have an advanced degree; when Izrail applied to emigrate, the Soviet government would not let him because in 1973, the government required that Jews who wanted to emigrate had to pay 6,000 rubles for each diploma they had

earned; Izrail and Frida decided to wait to apply to emigrate until times were better; around 1988, Izrail emigrated to the United States, however, Frida remained in Russia and died in 1989; Izrail's sisters are in Kishinev and are unable to obtain visas; Izrail's daughter, Greta Etingen, was born in 1962.