THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: SOFIA MIKHAILOVNA GINZBURSKY

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Q: SOFIA MIKHAILOVNA, TELL ME, PLEASE, WHAT WAS YOUR NAME AS A CHILD, WHO WERE YOUR PARENTS? DO YOU REMEMBER THEIR DATES OF BIRTH? TELL ME WHEN YOU WERE BORN, WHERE YOU WERE BORN, AND WHAT WAS YOUR LIFE LIKE AS A CHILD?

A: I lived in Belorussia. My father was Moisei Rotin, my maiden name was Rotina. And I need to mention my mother's maiden name--Kuznetsova. They lived at that time in Belorussia, in

Osipovichi. I was born there; it's now considered to be in Mogilev Province.

There were three children. My mother died at 27, in 1921. There was a famine, and she died at the age of 27. And they parcelled all of us out wherever they could. That is, one sister went to one grandfather, the second sister to another grandfather, and I also wound up with one grandfather. So I lived there for a while, a very short while, because grandfather had a second wife and she did not want extra children. They sent me away-- that is, I left with papa for Gomel Oblast, to a little place called Shatylkino. There he got married, and my step-mother didn't want him to take his children in either. So they sent me back to grandfather in Gomel, and there I entered what was called a PTS, or whatever it's called. No, at the Children's Home there was some kind of organization called the ODD, the Children's Friend Society. So it was the Children's Friend Society that I was accepted into, through acquaintance, it's true. I boarded there and lived in an apartment and studied. Later in Gomel I got situated in a PTS (Professional-Technical School). I worked as a metal worker.

Afterwards when I finished the PTS, I had dreamed all my life of going to Leningrad. In Leningrad I did not have any close relatives, but there were distant relatives. And I went there. I even turned to people I didn't know, to acquaintances, and I lived with them for a while. Later my relatives arranged for me to work for them as a nurse. I went with the children to the baths, looked after them, they had three children. After I had lived in Lenigrad a

couple of years, one of my relatives invited me, got me a job. That was in Leningrad in '36 or '37. And so I worked at first as a secretary; I was very sharp. After that, I was a draftsman, and I worked in that Gipromez_____ for 7 years, received commendations and everything.

Later I began corresponding with my husband. He came to Lenin-grad and we were registered. He took me to Belorussia, to the city of Gomel--he was himself from Gomel. A year before that, I had been in Gomel, and he said that he would come to Leningrad. A year later he came, we were registered, and I left for Gomel. In Gomel I lived from '37 through 'forty--...when the war with Poland began--then in western Belorussia. At that time my husband was studying in an evening institute; he finished a pedagogical institute, and they sent him to Belostok, at the time they took Poland. And in Belostok he was the director of a Russian school. I also taught in the lower grades. I already had two sons, two little boys.

In all we lived in Belostok one academic year. Then my husband was called to Leningrad to a seminar for school directors. And I was invited to go to Belostok with the two children on a visit. My husband's mother was also visiting us at the time. So I stayed with the two children and a sick mother. At this time he arrived in Leningrad on the l9th of June and hears--he left on the l9th and on the 21st of June he heard at the train station Molotov's speech that there was war, that the Germans had attacked us. Since Belostok was the border with Germany, the Germans were upon us

already at 5 o'clock in the morning. There was terrible bombing, terrible.

They gathered us Russians and put us on a freight car, the tall kind. We were climbing on and jumping out of there. We got on that freight car, the two children, mama and I, without taking anything. We set off just as we were. When we got to the train, at first they didn't want to let us on at all; for some reason they kept talking in the beginning about sabotage of some sort. That was at night, already towards evening. But in the morning the train set off, and we got as far as Volkovysk station, and we were bombed. Well, everyone had gotten on with whatever they had, and so in general nobody had anything. There in Volkovysk, when they began to bomb us, the two children, mother and I went into a vegetable garden. But an airplane flew very low, and some people were killed there, and we walked over the dead bodies. All the same fate preserved us; somehow we weren't hit.

We had nothing. The younger boy was simply dying of hunger--they were hungry. Cars were passing; our troops were retreating. But at Volkvysk the Germans, somehow, did not overtake our vehicles. And so I began running after the vehicles, asking for some bread or anything, and they threw me several pieces of sugar. I gave them to the children and they were saved by it.

Then they bombed all day long, they said because of a bridge, so we got into a chicken coop. How we climbed in there I simply don't know. There was no air inside--the roof right over our heads, and all that down below. We were suffocating there and

decided to leave toward evening, and came out half dead, the children, mother and I.

Then we went into a forest. The forest the Germans illuminated with a projector--it was as bright as it is here--and they saw everyone, who was lying down and where. But for some reason they did not bomb the forest, and we scarcely survived that terrible night. In the morning we got up, went around to the villages to ask for a little piece of bread and for something to clothe the children with--barefoot, naked. Someone pointed out to us some kind of military point in Volkovysk, where military personnel were retreating. There were a great number of military there at that time, and wives and families were leaving huge piles of all kinds of goods there. We went there and I picked out a few things to wear for myself and the children, shoes of some sort and everything.

And we set off for the villages. We begged a piece of bread, and that's how we lived through it. But we simply could not get where we wanted. I don't remember how long we were in that Volkovysk, but I think we lived there about a week, going round to all the villages for food, and at night sleeping in the forest.

Later, when we left, when the Germans began to capture our cities, we began to ask that they--I spoke German, I was a German language teacher--so we began asking them to take us to the next....They say, "nach Osten," that is, "to the East." We began asking them--they were going to Zhlobin--to take us to Zhlobin, you understand, since we were from Zhlobin, from the east. They

could see that we went to liberate Poland, but it was they, we said, who liberated it, and all. I went up to one vehicle and asked him to take us, the children and mother, and he took us and drove us to Zhlobin.

When we arrived in Zhlobin at the train station, we went to the first house we came to. Refugees were there too, from other cities of western Belorussia as well as us, which means....I forgot to say that after Volkovysk we were also in Baranovichi. Is that important? We were also in Baranovichi, and in Baranovichi I tore up all my documents. Because the Germans said, they were saying openly that the kikes are Bolshevism, and that we will exterminate them all, and life will be good for you without kikes, and all that kind of thing. And so I destroyed my documents. When I wound up without documents in Baranovichi, the commandant's office was giving out Ausweis, that is, certificates, at least identity papers, it seems. It was then that I changed my name from "Ginzbursky" to "Gidursky," it sounds more like. So I went to the commandant's office, and some sort of little old, old German general was sitting there. I told him in German that I speak German. He said, "Go to the typist, she'll type it up for you, tell her." I went and said "Gidursky." I was Sofia Moiseevna, but I said "Sofia Mikhailovna,"and I have remained so. I said, "Gidursky, Sofia Mikhailovna," such and such a year, that I was going home to Gomel with two children, that the children's Russian names were Vitia and Lyonia, Viktor and Leonid. And they wrote it down, so that I could [show] to any German who might stop me that I was going

home from Belostok. So they gave me that little certificate. I thanked them and left.

There, too, in Baranovichi later I found a vehicle--that wasn't from Volkovysk but from Baranovichi--it was a German transport truck that we had. They took us in this transport as far as Zhlobin--they told us where they were going, I'd asked them. Zhlobin had already been liberated, and even earlier we had wandered from place to place and arrived in Bobruisk. But there all the shutters were closed--we arrived early. The city was empty, the Germans alone were shuffling around--it was terrifying. I went into the first house I saw, as others joined me--they were refugees from Gomel. The shutters were closed. I went into the kitchen and began looking around to see who was there, fell into the basement, and hit my leg so badly that it took a good year for it to heal. They even treated me in the German commandant's office. And I was afraid to go there for fear they might recognize me. I had immediately put on a kerchief like this, and, red-cheeked, young, I didn't look like.... And so I healed this leg in Bobruisk three months. It [the city] was in a noose; it was surrounded all the time but couldn't be taken.

So I got work--I speak German--at some kind of warehouse. I went there with the children and asked that they take me on. I got work there. They used to exchang our products--soap, grain--no, they gave out sugar and exchanged it for our products. And when they gave me work, I fed mother and the children, you understand. And those who were with me in the apartment were also refugees.

We fed ourselves this way. And every day they gave me a jar of grain or a little jar like this, or a [regular] jar of sugar.

Later, when the Germans surrounded and captured Bobruisk, they were moving, they said, toward Zhlobin. So once again I found a vehicle, right there where I worked. There were Russians there, too, and they took us to Zhlobin. And I had already received a certificate: it said that the goods I had were not stolen, that I had received them from the deutsche Wehrmacht.

I arrived in Zhlobin. My 70-year-old grandmother was living there. I left the children in one of the houses where there were all kinds of refugees. They all looked at my Vitia. The Germans were there then, and the front, and they weren't yet looking so closely. There were no SS. And I left the children with mother (my husband's) and ran off to visit my grandmother. I thought that maybe all my husband's family would be living there. But all my husband's family had already been evacuated. But this grandmother was there, poor woman--it was there that they killed her. And so I called grandmother, I was afraid to walk around the city. And I gave her a lot of sugar, grain--we weren't starving. But afterwards they shot them there. That was my grandmother, the one who after mama and they sent me away to grandfather, she raised me.

Q: WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A: Gisia. Gisia. Grandfather was no longer, he was already dead. But grandmother was alive, and so I gave her a great deal of everything. And she said that a week before, our troops, Russians,

had been there, and that your husband came and thought that maybe you were staying with me or something. He was searching for you. And in Gomel, too. But that was a week before--go catch him after he had left along with the front!

Then we arrived in Gomel, and there was one woman from Gomel with us. She had her own house. I had nothing in Gomel, since we were already living in Belostok. I left the children, ran to look up my relatives. There was no one. But I decided to stay with that woman from Gomel. She dropped by and said, "Oi, it's our house, but there are already prisoners who have escaped from the jail." So they yelled, "It was your house, but now it's our house, so get out of here!" and all that. Well, I felt that they would murder us there. I wandered and wandered around, and we lived there a few days.

The Polizei came. One says, "You're a yid. Go to work." They didn't really need anything, except to make fun of us. When they sent me, it was out to a deep, excavated hole. I left the children and mother, and let myself down into this hole. There was sand pouring down on me, and I stood and dragged buckets of sand out of there--such weight! [weeps] And I would dump it out, and they would mock me. And it went that way for a week. After that they sent me for water; I would bring two buckets of water and they would pour it out--that was so I would be kept working.

Then, one of them was the chief Polizei--he came from the jail, a tall man, the other was shorter--he commanded the other one: "Get a rifle, guard them with it!" And he would stand near us.

Later one time toward evening I began to plead with him--I used to ask all the time, I said that I had relatives living here. "I'll go, it'll be better with the children," I said, "with mama, with a relative." And here these women joined in, they were together with them and had all come from the jail. I started to beg, "Two children," I said, "anyway I am in your hands; just let me get together with my relative, so that...." And so, one time, maybe it was his mood--he had been drinking: "Well, all right, go!"

And so I tore off a board from the fence, you understand, and the children, mama and I ran away. No, mama I had already sent off earlier, without asking them. And the children and I and mama went there.

We went to the place where mama's husband's nephew lived. But he had already been evacuated. One woman was living there, of loose behavior, sort of. She was a little.... And she said to me, "Live with us." It was the house of her brother, Fima, that is. In general, there's a house, so live here. So mama and I went. But there was no space; refugees from Belostok were already there. But next door was a bombed house, a duplex; one half had been bombed, with a stove and everything. But the other half was intact, and so mama and the others lived in the intact part. The children and I slept on the floor, bricks were strewn about and the stoves were ruined. It wasn't even possible to walk through easily. So we spent the nights on the floor and stayed in that bombed out half. Later mama found out that....[has the sniffles] I didn't bring a handkerchief along...Young lady!

[Male voice: Five seconds.]

Q: (unintelligible)

Q: IN GOMEL, WHERE YOU WENT, WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE WOMAN FROM GOMEL?

A: Nadia.

Q: NADIA? DO YOU REMEMBER HER LAST NAME?

A: No, I don't know her last name.

Q: WERE ALL THOSE WHO ESCAPED FROM THE JAIL CRIMINALS?

A: Yes, criminals. But this is another house; in that other one, yes,
criminals.

Q: WERE THEY POLIZEIS?

A: They were connected with the Polizeis. The [Polizeis] didn't touch them, just us. "Yids," he said, "you were running," he says. My children were dressed in those little velvet suits there, in Belostok--in Poland at that time you could find everything, that nonsense didn't cost anything. "Why are these little yids dressed in these little suits, when we don't have them, there never have been any in Russia? Why is it like that? After all, you haven't been working here." I say, "I worked as a teacher." "That isn't work." In general, get to work, and so I did what they told me.

Q: AND SO YOU WENT TO ANOTHER HOUSE?

A: I did, we went to this Nadia. She was so kind; well, a little disorganized, she really did have something missing. But she wasn't bad. And all kinds of, well, cavaliers came to see her. Of course, we put up with all that.

We lived in Gomel for some months. We arrived there in August, the war started in June-- we arrived there at the end of July, the beginning of August, and lived there until November. Cold, freezing weather set in. My children had nothing, shoes. She opened up this nephew's barn and said, "Take his stuff, whatever you need." And so I took a padded jacket. I was doing laundry for these German field kitchens. For that they would give me a piece of soap, kerosene. At that time already there was no light and the electricity had already been shut off. Living in the courtyard next to our house was a woman who knew how to sew. Out of these padded jackets--I asked her--she sewed these little black...mm...so their feet wouldn't freeze, after all they were still wearing little shoes. I gave her kerosene, while we ourselves sat in the dark, and she sewed for me.

We dressed ourselves in something or other--they call it a leather jacket--a torn, tattered sheepskin. I got acquainted with one other woman there. This woman was from Baranovichi who also had two children. She's already died, unfortunately, from all this. And I saw that her little boy was obviously a Jew, but the little girl wasn't so much. So I got acquainted with her, so that it wouldn't be so frightening. I had been running around alone, going to the kitchen, I was afraid.

And so she and I went together. I said, "Do you want to?" And she and I ran, the two of us, collected the linen to wash for those bastard Germans, from their field kitchens--it was right at the front. These [Germans] were ok. They would give us a piece of

soap or kerosene, gasoline, I don't know, everything they could, they took what they could. Because we used to give it away and they would give us something. She and I washed the linen together. We were there three months.

She was very untypical. She was dark, it's true, but her eyes were blue--not very typical, but like a Gypsy. At that time the Germans didn't differentiate. It was our people who could distinguish. More than anything else I was afraid of our people, because I didn't know who anyone was, maybe they'd betray us. She and I went together, and later, they created a ghetto. Before we started doing laundry, we had been there three months.

My great uncle lived in Gomel. I decided that it was very far from the place where we were staying. I decided to visit. The children and I went there, and I was told that a peasant of some sort was living there away from his village, a Sidor--or whatever his name was-- and that he was working in the Polizei. A little old lady was living in one small room--there were three rooms there. So I went in to the old lady and said where does so and so live.

"Oi, my daughter," she says. "Don't you tell anyone, you don't look at all like a Jew. Tell no one, or else...and leave here immediately. Otherwise he will kill you, after all he is working for the Polizei, this peasant. He took all," she says, "of uncle's belongings. Without even taking a thing, uncle was evacuated. They died there." In evacuation, that is. "It's for them," she says, "he's working. Don't show yourself to anyone, don't show yourself.

Go away from here, do you understand, he'll kill you. But come on, I'll feed you first."

That was the old woman. Afterwards I went to see her, when the war ended, and I gave her what I could, I had nothing. And I brought her everything, kissed her. But the other one died, they say, that Nadia. She had been so sick. Anyway, I dropped in on her: buttons were needed, I unravelled things, I gave away what I could. She fed me borshch and said, "Don't tell anyone, anyone, that you are a Jew! You don't look like one."

And suddenly he comes in, whatever his name was, I don't remember. He comes in and says, "Well, what are you doing here?" I say, "I'm a niece." "Hmm. Well now, where are you coming from?" I say, "We were in western Belorussia, living in Poland. We were all evacuated and I came directly here. I thought they would be here."

Then he left, immediately. And she says, "He has gone to report to the police, so that they'll kill you here. Run wherever your feet take you!" The children and I ate some of the borshch, I grabbed the children, we had nothing. I thought, where can we go? The nearest village is over there, but to get to it you have to go through such a swamp. But I set off with the children, and a terrible thunderstorm broke over us. Our feet sank right up to here in the mud, so that you walk and think I won't make it. I thought I saw a church there, but then I decided that in the village everyone knows everyone else, while here we're hidden. There someone would surely turn us in.

So I returned. The storm! Sheets of rain! I carried one little boy, the two-year-old, in my arms, and the four-year-old dragged along behind by my skirt. I walked and walked. Later I came back already but was afraid to go in--I passed by the house. I went to the main street there, called "Internatsionalnaya." I went in; at one time it had been a technical school. I went into the technicum, and newly arrived refugees had already occupied it. It was full of people from western Belorussia, everyone was escaping from Poland. So they came, and I saw a lot of people. I started to plead with them on the street, in the courtyard. I said, "Take us in for the night; it's storming, we're soaked and everything, just let us spend the night." I had decided to go again to Nadia's. But everyone was staying there, and she said, "If you get under the table." The children and I lay down under the table in the kitchen. Germans came. They were drinking, frying potatoes and all. My children were little and started talking. I said, "Quiet, quiet. They mustn't hear us under the table." And somehow we didn't sleep that night and survived, and the children understood and didn't cry. We scarcely survived the night, and early in the morning, when it began to get light, the children and I [left] when people began moving around--it was impossible to leave earlier, when people would have noticed that someone was walking around. I was afraid to walk around the streets, and went back to Nadia's where mama was and all those refugees.

When I got there, they said to me, "Oi, how thin you've become. It's even hard to recognize you." That happened in the time that I

was there at my uncle's place, and I slipped away out from under his hands--he was going to turn me in so that they would kill me, you understand. Later I reminded him of it, I found him. When uncle returned and went to his place in the village, he left; he was afraid when our troops came. So I saw him. I gave it to him good then: "You fascist!" I said. "How could you not let us stay the night?" I was afraid. That Polizei kept silent, but at the same time I was afraid of him because he could have shot me, he had a revolver. He was terrifying.

So when we arrived, I decided, let them kill me, but I'm not going anywhere else. Nowhere, not with the children. When we had lived there for a while, and the other woman and I had been laundering, suddenly, during the day, a German comes with a little old interpreter and a guard-dog. And they say, "There's a yid woman living here with two little yids. Which one of you is it?" We say, there are a lot of people here, but here she is with two children. I had put on a kerchief, and had put something on Vitia--he had black hair. And Lyonia too. "Which one of you is it?" He says, "Is it you?" And he started poking his finger at each one. And she says, "But these two women are evacuees." That was Nadia, you understand. She understood the situation and said, "These two women are evacuees, they are Russians."

"All right. This woman is coming with me," and he took not me, but her. You understand, they should have taken me. Why? Because, when mama and I arrived, there were no neighbors, but opposite us lived a Schmidt, a German by nationality, but a

resident of Gomel. He worked at the electric station. When the Germans came, he was waiting only for that. He donated his apartment, he had electric light, music was booming, he had everything.

And suddenly she comes and says, "I'm here with Boria's wife and two children. We're living right here opposite." Can you imagine? I didn't know him at all, nor he me. They sent someone from the village to visit the people behind barbed wire in the camp--they'd gathered all the men together. One of them went to the village. Later he came to the camp and told [her]. She asked who was living there? It was her great-nephew there. And he said to ask, if anyone [he knows?] was in Gomel, have them come out there. They were given cows, the collective farms had been disbanded, and everything.

And so she says, there's a holiday right now--those autumnal, Jewish New-Year's holidays. I'll go out there, and afterwards, if it's all right, I'll let you know and you can come out--a lot of people are coming from the camp here. So that's what we decided. And she went there with that peasant, to Buda-Koshelevo station. It's another seven kilometers on foot from Buda-Koshelevo to Rubichi, the village of Rubichi, but that's not important. So she arrived in Buda-Koshelevo, and there were those nephews. They received her well, and until the new year it was fine there. They distributed everything, it was ok. But as soon as the SS came and the Polizei, they started collecting the Jews and executed them all there in January. Do you understand? They shot her there. I

didn't know anything about it, but I found out later. It was those refugees who told me, the woman that I washed laundry with.

At first she was afraid of me and didn't tell me what nationality she was. But I had already told her; she knew that it was my nephew who lived there. But then when I had gained her confidence--by washing together and by dividing our bread in half with the children and everything, she told me that she, too, was a Jew. I had thought that she was, but if she didn't say anything, I didn't want to ask her.

So she and I lived in Gomel until November--that's three months--when he, that German, came and took her. When he took her away, that Nadia says, "Go away from here. Run wherever your eyes take you, or else they'll pick me up too on account of you." But where could you run? Already evening, and where? Her children stayed behind, they took only her. My children and hers burst out crying, raised a ruckus. We knew, after all. And he took only her, for the time being. They took her away, and I ran off, but there was nowhere to run to. At the railway station stood the railroad schools. There was a German stables there: they were loading horses, sending them to the front.

Then they took on straw, and everything smelled nasty. So I put them [the children] on the straw, and myself ran to find out where she was. My heart was breaking, because I knew that it was me they ought to have taken. Because that man knew for sure, that Schmidt. Mama had told him.

I started to run around, ran as far even as her very apartment--that's a long ways from the station. And I came to the window and said, "Sonia's not here?" "Not yet." Her name was Sonia, too. She says,

"Run, don't you dare...." And I had the stupidity to think all the time that all the same I would not survive. And I said to her, "Tell her that we are at the station." This was so that, if the Germans should come after me, she would say that [I] had gone to the station. But I did not value life and thought that if she didn't come out, then let them kill me too. So I said, "Say that I'm at the station with the children."

And I left. Later I ran out several times, leaving the children alone, and they cried. Then, late in the evening when it was already dark--I had said that we were still at the station--so she told her. They let her go, and she and I met on the street. How we cried, you cannot imagine. How we embraced each other, how we kissed, and I dragged her into that stable and sat her children down.

Oh, I left something out before that. Yes, when they brought her to the police station, an investigator was sitting there, with a nose like this. She came in, they shoved her in, and one other man was sitting there. And he says, "Gut morgen, shvester"--"Hello, sister." She said nothing. "Why are you pretending? You're all Uzbeks or Chichmeks around here. You're all of you," says he, "non-Jews."

She says, "So what? I really am not a Jew."

She had a document with "Lisitskaya" on it. And following her example in Baranovichi--we had met there--she took it before I did. And me too, she ordered me to do it.

She says, "I am not a Jew."

"I can tell by your nose who you are."

She says, "Its even easier to tell by your nose who you are."

He was so amazed that she could speak so boldly. That meant, probably, that there was some truth to it, for her to speak so boldly. And then he caught her in some kind of mistake in the spelling of a word, and she told him that, "No, this is the way it's written. It's you who don't know." And in general, it went like that. But he went on terrorizing her and all the time asking such questions as where are you from and the like. She says, "I am from Briansk. Let me go, my parents are there. You can go there with me and you'll see that I'm Russian," and in general she talked and talked.

The man who was sitting there says, "No, it's not this one, and I don't know about the other one." But he looked hard at her. He had walked around the courtyards and had seen me and taken note of me with the children. And he says, "No, this one...." If it had been me, that would have been it--I wouldn't have gotten away from there; they would have brought the children and everything. But since it was her, he said, "No, I don't know, this one isn't the right one." And because she denied it so vigorously and conducted herself so boldly, he let her go. "Well, ok, go." We've got you, anyway, so to speak. And he let her go. Then she ran off to the

station. Nadia had told her that I was at the station, and she came running. Then we embraced, went and began looking for an apartment. What would we be doing in a stables, and the Germans find us: "What's going on? Why are we hiding? Why aren't we in an apartment?"

So, the railroad houses stood there. We went into one house, it was full of Germans, potatoes are cooking. We went in and say that we are ourselves from Orel, we're waiting. Maybe they'll take us, give us a lift, after all this is a railway line. They told us that the trains were going to the front, and the front was already near Orel--our army was moving so rapidly. And we are, we say, ourselves from Orel. I say, "We're waiting. Maybe someone will give us a lift? Let us in to spend the night, we have nowhere to sleep. Here we are with children, ragged, in sheepskins and bast shoes." She says, "Well, in the kitchen, under the table." Again. I say, "Well, all right." And so she nevertheless gave the children a couple of potatoes, they had something to eat, lay down under the table, and so fell asleep like sheaves of wheat. They had cried their eyes out all day, staying in the stables, while I went running around looking for things. Then they took her too--she had two children, I had two children, we were together.

We put the children to bed, and I started running around while she sat there with the children under the table. And I started running around to find out--an empty special train was standing there. Where was that train going? They said, to the front. Where at the front? "Nach Oriel"--"To Orel." We were so delighted. I

say, "Take us. We are from Orel. We came here on a visit and they took our husbands. Stalin took them," we said. "We can't get home, we're naked and barefoot, and we have nothing."

"Go to the train commander," said one. They are the ones who convoy the trains; they are neutral Germans. We ran to the first car, and there is the train commander, a young lad of some sort. And I started to tell him in German: children, I'm all tattered, ragged, and I brought this woman with me. I say, "So, we're travelling, we are from Orel. I beg you," so to speak, and I tell him in German, "Take us." He says that it's horses being shipped here. We're sending the horses there. There's a pole here and a partition there, and over here there are three, four horses, I don't remember. So he says, "Well, are you going to ride with the horses?" We say, "Yes." We are running away from death; you run wherever you can. He says, "This train will depart, but keep checking to find out when! They'll take you in to one of the heated cars." And he told someone at some....

I went away; that night we didn't sleep, what else? We kept running to find out whether the train was leaving, or whether it had already left and we had slept through it. Anyway, in general we didn't sleep at nights. We went there, and only at six o'clock in the morning did that train start moving. Before that we saw that it was supposed to leave, all the Germans were gathering, all of them, and we went too.

One of the Germans that I had asked when he is leaving, said, at six o'clock in the morning. I began to ask, to beg them to help us.

The horses were already standing there and everything, to help us get into that passageway where horses stood on one side and the other, and between them a little corridor, asked them to help us into that corridor.

It's true they helped us, they helped slip the children in there. We ourselves shoved the children in there and she and I got into the corridor together one after the other. I don't remember whether they helped us. But someone of them must have helped us because those [cars] are so high, they helped us. And we climbed in there. The horses are standing there. When the train started off, we broke down and cried so hard. Now we will stay alive, we said. If we slipped away from the dog, from the interpreter, and even from the police dog, we'll stay alive, you understand. We were so sure that we said now we'll stay alive, because in Gomel they knew everything, and that one man in particular. And the train set off and we were so glad.

Horrors! There was nothing to eat on the journey. In Briansk, in the Briansk forests the partisans were bombing. We would have been glad if they had killed us (weeps), we would have been glad if a bomb had landed on the train, anything whatever. An airplane was flying around, everyone was afraid, the trains were stopping--and we were glad because we were fed up with living like that.

In Briansk we jumped off the train and asked the Germans for a piece of bread. "So! Wieso Zivil? Zivil?" Where did you come from? This is a military train, and you are civilians. "Zivil" means civilian. Where are the Zivil from, they shouted. Some gave, and

some didn't. But we collected a few heels from the bread, and someone even gave some sugar. And we climbed in--we helped each other--climbed in somehow. How did we do it--youth can do anything. We climbed into that car, into the heated car. On the way one horse bucked and knocked out a tooth--I have a steel tooth, this one here. And it knocked out a tooth. We put up with all of it to get away from Gomel. We arrived. The train must have been on the road three days, I don't know--very slow. We were bombed the whole way: the Briansk forests are here, and the front was not far away. And they bombarded us terribly. Nevertheless we got to the station at Orel.

They put us off directly, like the horses. They took them off someplace, but we wound up on the platform. Rail lines all around. Rain coming down in sheets. The children's feet were freezing. I remember, we begged a little kerosene and we rubbed then with that. And we came off that platform, off the rail line and went out into the city. But it was dark already. So I knocked at the first house we came to. They were still asleep, we had arrived at night. An old man of some sort came out and says, "What is it?" And I say, "We've just arrived with the horses; we're evacuees; we're on our way to Voronezh," we said. Or to Tula, I don't remember, there near Orel. Tula? I think near Orel. No, "We're going to Voronezh," we said, and that we are from there. "We think that it's close, somehow we'll get there. But in the meanwhile we've got children," I said. "Take us in for the night." Well, you know, he opened the door to us and let us get on the stove. And we climbed

up on it. It was hot, and we climbed onto the stove. And we spent the whole night there.

In the morning they fed us. It was an old man and old lady living there. He says, "The Germans are quartering a lot of men, this is the front, after all." The Orel-Kursk arc was the front there for very many years. "We are afraid," he says, "that the Germans will settle in with us. Well, go on, there on the stove." That's the reason he let us in. And so we ate something there at his place in the morning, the children, and then the children and I went to find an apartment, one near the station.
The station had had a terrible bombing. Terrible. But we weren't afraid. We didn't fear the bombing from our troops. We were only afraid of the Germans, Germans and the Russians, of course, even more. Because the Germans imagined the Jews to have noses like this, with those long temple locks. But we were already Russianized.

In general we took the children to look somewhere. He pointed out to us that there, far from the house, he says, is a large house where they are taking refugees. So we went there and there really were refugees already there. But they wouldn't let us in with the children. So we spent two nights there. They took it for granted, of course, that my Vitia is the spit and image of a Jew, and her little boy, too. In general, we went to find an apartment. But we went to find something to eat. There was no place to eat, but somehow they fed those children a little. There were a lot of refugees, and we were famished.

We set out, and there was a little house standing to one side, by itself. A Latvian woman lived there and her Georgian husband. For some reason they wound up in Orel during the war, I don't remember how. And they had this little house. Her husband was taken. She lived totally alone--she had an eleven-year-old daughter. She came to the house where the refugees were and said, "Well, I'll take this pair with the four children." Then came the personal data. They asked what kind of work we can do, who we are, and she sees that we're intellectuals. "I'll take them. You're Russians?" "Yes, Russians," we said. We already had that document that we weren't Russians, but "Gidursky" is, after all, not "Ginzbursky."

And so, she says, "Well, I'll take this pair. I have an empty house. God forbid that the Germans should come there," she says. "I'm afraid. Come to my place, girls," she tells us. And she took us. You understand? And those who were living there she knew like neighbors. She took us to her place. And so we lived at her place for two years under the German occupation. We lived there even longer.

Later we ran away from there--we were afraid. We lived there two years. But you know we went to the platform to wash the field kitchens, to wash the pots, to launder, and they would give her and me a pot, a pot each, and every time fill it with soup for the children. And we would bring it home, divide it with everybody and, in fact, we supported her and her daughter. And we used to eat lentils there, or they would give us lentils and the

children would get sick from it--oi, that was something. And rotten potatoes--they used to bring them potatoes, it was already below freezing. And so they used to throw us the sweet, rotten potatoes. We would wash the peelings and put them through a meatgrinder.

But we had nothing to heat with. And so we dug out every stump that we caught sight of. The Germans were bombing after all, and stumps remained. And so with great effort we pulled them out, dug them out, brought them to her and she heated with them. She stayed with the children, fed them, and we brought [things], and washed pots. We would have dinner there and would bring her our pails and a little piece of bread. So, we had work and were content.

But, the kitchen work, after all, couldn't last forever. Right next to us was a house. And there was a son there, and this son served as a Vlasovite--he was in a detachment of Vlasovites. He was exterminating the partisans. And you know, he started dropping in on us. People said--they saw that the children were on the street, there's no way to restrain them--that refugees of some kind were living there, and he began coming to see us. Do you know, our hearts would stop as soon as he would come. We didn't know what to do. We tried to make up to him and defended the Vlasovites and said that, really, it would be a good thing to catch all those partisans and all sorts of things. But at the bottom of our hearts we had the creeping suspicion that he understood who we were.

But the woman says, "It makes no difference to me who you are." She was a Latvian, the woman whose house we were living in. She says, "It makes no difference who you are," she says, "I don't care, I need these girls." And we began to be afraid that he was starting to drop by. He used to go away to kill the partisans for two weeks at a time--_____ and collect them. And then he would be home for two weeks. Well, you know, we were young, women with two children, and he began to stop by. He would come in, tell jokes and everything. Then our landlady says, "Well, this calls for Germans." The landlady was also afraid. Who knows what he might do to her for keeping us? So she says, "We've got to let two Germans in, because all of you will be there in the bedroom, so we have to let them in here into the front room. Then he'll stop coming ." Well, we couldn't say anything in general, and we ourselves were terribly afraid.

So she let two Germans in. They used to make trips to the front: one was a kind of bookkeeper-paymaster and issued the Germans their pay; the second was also something there. Such educated Germans. She let them in, they brought two cots and sat in the front room. And it was true, when that other one would come, they used to drive him away. And he stopped coming to see us. Nevertheless we were afraid.

That they took in Germans, that was something! "We," [he] says, "want to annihilate the Soviet regime and everything." But we weren't the landlords. He understood that we ourselves were..., that she was the landlady, it was her house. In general,

that was the way we lived--the Germans in the front, and all of us in the bedroom with her. Oi! How we suffered! But as far as food goes it was already easier. They used to give us bread, let's say. Well, we all were working and bringing things home. So we lived like that, doing laundry.

Later an order was given in Orel. Then the SS came. So we were generally afraid, and didn't go out anywhere. That was the usual practice: behind the front came the SS, and they collected the Jews.

I left out something else about Gomel. Before we left they set up a ghetto; they set up a ghetto for the Jews--in Gomel, this is. That was in the months of September-October. They set up the ghetto in '41.

They gathered the Jews together into the most terrible little corner. It was called the "little monastery," a low spot where all the water drained. They found one house there--the only one--where they put maybe hundreds of Jews. The things that went on there! People were sick, got sick, suffocated and everything. They lived in this house, and later they were taken out to be exterminated in trucks, they were shot. The earth literally breathed. And so she and I decided that we, after all, were Russians, we wouldn't go there for anything. And there was an order that all Jews must put yellow patches on their backs and walk around with those yellow patches. Well, she and I decided--she was just as adamant as I was--that we were not Jews, that we wouldn't put those patches on and wouldn't go to the ghetto.

The city seemed to have gotten absolutely empty. They were not only from Gomel, but also from Streshin, from Chechersk, from all over Gomel Oblast. From all the towns, because in Gomel, in fact, there were already no Jews, or few. And so they collected all of them in the Oblast and put them all in that house. And it was impossible to stand up normally there, to say nothing of lying down; that was the situation. Then they were all loaded into a truck, we saw it ourselves--we walked down the street, we couldn't resist--we saw them being carted off to execution, these people. (weeps) As we walked along, some women were walking behind us, "These here look very much like, too; but they can't be Jews or they would have picked them up too." You know, that's what we heard. We thought we wouldn't be able to stand it. We returned home crying so hard. No one knew who we were; no one could prove it. We had documents.

Afterwards we did not show ourselves on the streets. For the time being we only ran to work on the platforms to do the wash where those field kitchens stood. In general while we were there in Gomel they killed all those Jews, all, all of them with the yellow patches. They put them on all of them. There was one beggar woman who went from house to house to beg for a piece of bread, yellow patches here and there. (points) And when we saw her, oi, my God! And so we went, we wanted to see. They were taking them somewhere to some pit. And the trucks were full--they were standing up on the trucks--and they were taking them to execution. But we survived because we ran away from it. But if

we had been there any longer, maybe they would have found us too. And that was in Gomel.

Well, in Orel, when we started to eat and everything, we went there. And then, a year and a half later, they began--the SS arrived, the Polizei were organized, but the partisans continued to exist nevertheless. As long as the front was so near Orel, we attempted to go into the forest to be with the partisans. We saw that the Obkom Secretary was already hiding there, and afterwards we lived with a couple of them.

They arrived. There was an order issued that anyone without identity papers would be shot. What could we do? But to get a temporary German passport, identity papers like that, you had to write down who your mama was, your religious faith. We began agonizing about what to do. What two people could we take as witnesses? We went here, there, talked with everyone, and, generally, if it's your fate to live, then there's nothing you can do--you'll live. We ran across two women and got talking somehow, "Where are you from?" I say, "We're from Voronezh." "Oh, we're from Voronezh, too." "What street did you live on?" I figured that every city has a Pervomaiskaya Street, and we said, Pervomaiskaya. I say, "We lived on Pervomaiskaya." She thought a minute, "Yes, well we lived farther out." And so I say, "You know what, have you received your German passport?" She says, "[We have] no identity papers." I say, "We don't either." I say, "We ought to vouch for each other. You know what, let us vouch for you, and

you for us." "Let's do it." Oi, they were so glad, and we went straight off to the commandant's office.

When we entered the commandant's office, there were Russians sitting there. And I trembled. It seemed to me that she would see from my face that I was a Jew. I don't know, I just stood there and walked up to her when she started to write something out. First I vouched for one, then the other, and [my friend] for the other. And I shook for fear that she would say that you aren't Russian. "What is your name?" So I handed her my identity paper, the certificate. She wrote me down, and wrote "Orthodox," and for my mother "Grunia." I passed that on to my children, wrote it down, so that they would say, "Our Grandmother's name is Grunia." And father's is "Mikhail."--I had already become "Mikhailovna." And I made up a birthplace where I came from. In general, everything.

They wrote it all down and immediately gave me the identity paper. There were so many people there then, such noise. And they issued everyone such German passports that way. And when we vouched for them, and they for us, we were happy. They registered the children and everything. We arrived home happy, but it was all a misery. We were afraid to show ourselves to Russians all the time. We're afraid anyway. They didn't let the children in. For the whole two years that I lived in Orel, I shaved the children. My Vitia has curly hair, and Lyonia's hair curls, too, except that his is light. And so, you understand, I shaved their heads. Those Germans who lived with us at the apartment gave us the razor. "What for?" they said. "Why," we said, "you have to

shave them, cut [the hair]." And we shaved those heads and shaved them continually.

Then we went to the bazaar--that was during those two years. They already had bazaars, everything was set up when Orel was captured. Nevertheless it was terrible how they smashed everything near Orel. And every day one building or another would burn, or a house--the partisans would set it afire--every blessed day. We were glad, completely. But what came of it? We went to the bazaar, and private trade is already in full swing. One little old peasant is sitting on the ground selling crosses. I bought three crosses, one for myself and she did, too. And we put them on a string around the children's necks, as if to say that we are Orthodox. So all the time during the entire occupation, until our troops arrived, my children and I...I have that cross, but I just didn't bring it along. I gave the children their crosses like talismans, so that they might be protected.

The children knew all this, those boys that were with me. I hung them around their necks and even made them stick out, and shaved them endlessly. How I had the courage to shave their heads! Now I would be afraid to hold a razor in my hands! But then, I was so brave, and I shaved their heads with a safety razor. They never had any hair all that time, walked around with shaved heads so that there wouldn't be any curly hair. And they wore the crosses. That's all.

Later we went here and there--sometimes we washed the laundry, sometimes we decided that they were already taking note

of us. So we changed our place of work. They sent us here, and began to send Russians to shovel snow. We went on the snow detail, they took both of us, we were young, after all. We began collecting rocks by the side of the road. We went to drag those rocks. Then they sent us to the Briansk forest to saw trees, and root them out. We left the children with that woman, Galia was her name, and went to root out trees. We were there--well, I don't remember how long--several days. But we were exhausted, and worried about the children, and sawed up the trees with the peasants. You understand? We rooted them out to heat German rooms.

That was what was done. Then in a year and a half--we were there two years--in a year and a half, two years, we began to notice that we were somehow being watched. But it always seemed like that to us. That [fellow] came home, and the Polizei runs into us at the well--we were getting water. He came up to us, "How are you getting along, girls?" We say, "How else, all right." "Well, the Germans will come and everything will be fine. Us Vlasovites...today I killed such and such many partisans," he said. So generally we began to realize--they lived opposite in a little house--that was impossible for us to live there. The front was moving back toward Orel. Now the Germans would retreat, then they would advance again. All the time that was the Orel-Kursk arc. And we began to understand that we would have to separate: there were too many children, and we were together

and we were there all the time. The Russians began to observe us suspiciously from their houses.

So we got scared. One time we were really frightened and [realized] that the Germans could not protect us, that [the Russians] would prove that we were Jews. But you couldn't have proved anything by my children, they were not circumcised. But her boy was. In general my husband was a teacher and his mother convinced him saying, "Well, ok, don't do it, or else they'll throw him out of school." And so we didn't circumcise them.

In general, what should we do? We started to look around, but the times were such that well.... And airplanes began flying around and cannons began roaring and houses began burning, not just one house every day, but lots. We heard that there was supposed to be something and that they were coming for us, since the Germans were leaving for the front. So we started generally...we found apartments, she found one in the city a long ways away and I found one. We used to meet secretly, you understand.

But we had to eat, we had to wash the kitchen. The kitchens had already begun to get ready to leave for the front. I don't remember what else we did. We started to get bread. First we left there and went to other apartments--there were empty houses because many people were leaving. And we told her that we had to leave. For Voronezh.

Q: TO WHOM DID YOU SAY THIS?

A: We said it to Galia. All the same we did not tell her, even though her relationship to us was very good, and she swore [at us], and stayed with the children. But she was not any kind of Latvian nationalist. And so we started to tell her that we had to leave, that there was a vehicle that would take us. We deceived her, you know. And we left her. We gathered the children together, kissed each other good-bye and left. And she remained there by herself in the occupation and probably no one touched her.

So, in general, we started to meet secretly to look for bread, to beg for bread. Next door to the place where we lived in the apartment was a woman who kept Germans. They brought her a sack of buckwheat from a warehouse. So she used to pour us out a little in a pot and we cooked kasha for the children, without anything, but with just plain water. In general, we fed ourselves the best we could. As far as heating was concerned, there wasn't any--we lived in cold, hunger, or near hunger.

Later they said that that night there would be gunfire, that our troops would arrive. That was on the 5th of August, before morning.

Q: WHAT YEAR?

A: That was '42. The 5th of August, before morning. No, '43. No, not '42, because we were there for two and a half years, '43. And so we came there when we...you'll have to excuse me, I get mixed up because my head's not working: I've told this story already a hundred times and generally it's very hard for me.

When we started living in the new apartment, started getting our own bread there, it was very hard for us. We were starving, and suddenly they told us that we had lived in that apartment before. And they told us that the Germans were going to come at any time. But before that, when we were living in the apartment, I lived with an 80-year-old lady. Her daughter was evacuated with all the rest, but she says, "I'm not going anywhere," and stayed. She had icons all around. So when we were bombarded--our troops shelled us terribly when they began to attack--so she says, "There now, when your youngest son bows before the icon, we won't be smashed, no bomb will fall on us." But it happened that a bomb did fall on the Germans. They took me there to dig potatoes. I took the children there and a bomb fell on a house and a window frame fell on the child. I can't tell everything in order--I recall afterwards, that one thing or another happened.

So she says, "Vitenka, come here." She taught him: "Kneel down and say, 'Lord, protect, defend from harm, from attack.'" Of course, I was glad that he did that. When they used to ask him what his grandmother's name was, he would say "Grunia"--just what was needed. And when the Germans were there--when we lived at Galia's--he would go up to them and say, "Bitte, Brod. Bitte, Brod"--that's "Some bread, please." I taught him that. And they would give it to him; well, some gave and some didn't. In general, it was nightmarish.

The time when the window frame fell, I was in the potato fields--they had sent me out to dig potatoes. They started

bombing, and my children were sitting there in a meadow. Their tractors were standing there; they thought that they were there for good, had everything set up. So they brought their own tractors and everything. The technology was all theirs. So my children were sitting and playing and unscrewed the screws. One of them walked up and saw that and led him up by the ear and says, "You Schwein!"--that's swine. "He's a partisan!"--"Ein kleiner Partisan!"--a little partisan. "And he intentionally unscrewed the screws so that the machine wouldn't work!" Oi, the way he said that to me! "We'll find out yet who you are!" and everything like that. I thought I would go out of my mind. So I started to beat them, the children. He saw that I had lost control, that I'm crying and beating them, and that they're screaming. So he walked away from me; he certainly understood that that was no partisan. That moment was also a terrible one. There were a lot of such moments--they were children, after all. And I kept them hidden.

Then afterwards, when the bombing began and there was crossfire in the streets and our troops were approaching the city, I got terribly restless. I simply had to find out where Sonia was--the friend I did laundry with. So, they were firing at each other, our troops from under the bridge, and the Germans from the platforms. And I'm flying through between them. Why a bullet didn't find its way to me, I...and they were surprised. How I ran! They themselves were screaming and shouting, saying that they're busy killing Germans when here, you understand, a Zivil appears. And I'm running between them and nevertheless made it and asked

for Sonia. I say, "Our troops will be here tomorrow! Be ready! Where shall we meet?" We had to get that all said so that we'd know where and what. All the same I ran there and back; there was firing in the street, but I remained alive. How could I have left the children and everything? I acted so bravely, can you imagine? I myself marvel at how I acted there. I was unaware of anything and left the children and ran through the crossfire.

They bombarded so badly at night that we went to the basement. In the morning the Germans turned violent. Before they retreated, they tore open pillows, scattered the feathers, whatever you can think of they did--they doused the kitchen gardens so that it nothing could be eaten. And we ate whatever we...toward evening, late, when there were no more airplanes, we ran--all the gardens had been abandoned--to dig potatoes, to pick tomatoes, whatever there was, you understand. And that's what we lived on. We collected water. And so we lived in a basement for two weeks. And when the Germans were supposed to come, it was so terrible that I left the children. Even before that we lived in a church, under the church. But people said that the Germans know about that basement and would come there. And so we ran away from there. We lived a week under the church.

Then later I lived separately, as she did. So she was somewhere there. But we didn't know exactly when our troops would arrive. So early in the mornig, it was just getting light, a soldier came in--ours! He had a flashlight, started shining it around--who's there. He saw: children, old people, children, old

people. He had a mantle with a hood on it. It was already springtime, May--no, it was August, but he had a mantle on. So he took it all in and went out on the street, and I went running out of the basement after him, and threw my arms around his neck and started kissing him. (weeps) My God! I will never forget that, I started crying, it was terrible, terrible. They were our liberators, and all that. Then I led the children out onto the street. How I sobbed, you can't imagine, how I threw myself on him, how I kissed him!

One of the people who were there--all civilians--said, "She, poor thing, has good reason to cry!" That meant that they knew, but were decent people. I heard that myself, "She, poor thing, has good reason to cry!" That's the way we met out troops.

That's all, the whole story. There were a lot of things like those screws, and how the window frame fell on us and how the bomb fell and bombed us out.

Q: TELL US ABOUT THE WINDOW FRAME.

A: We were doing the bombing. They sent me out to the potato fields. I took the children, and they would give us potatoes for that. Their kitchen was there cooking, and we worked there. And when our men bombed Orel all the time, Orel was in the strip along the front. Our [aircraft] were bombing Orel, and a bomb fell. A plane flew over and [a bomb] fell not far away. A fragment blew out, the concussion blew out the window frame, and that window frame was right next to a bed. Lyonia slept there at night, and [it fell] right on him, he didn't even breathe for several minutes. We

thought, that's the end. But then he started to breathe again, he came out of it, you understand. When it's fated, it's fated.

Oh, my God! Oi, how much we went through! I am telling you only a part, a fraction of what happened in two and a half years. How much we went through! And we remained alive.

Then I started searching for my husband. Later Sonia and I met, we got together right away. Then we went to see Galia and said good-bye to her. Then she says, "I knew who you were, but I didn't care," she says. Then we found....A letter came to the post office. I had written. I had been told that in Buguruslan there was an office where you could search for evacuees. I wrote there to Buguruslan, and later somewhere else they told me to. And I wrote, "Dear Comrades! Write to me. My husband worked in Belostok in a railway school as its director, and was then called to the front. We got separated. Write me whether he is alive. Perhaps you know something about his life, whether he is alive there." Later I wrote to the Buguruslan evacuation bureau and I thought, well, he may not be alive, so they won't know. So I wrote. My husband had two sisters. I had been in Gomel, and had been told that they had been evacuated. So I wrote that I was searching for two sisters by the name of Ginzbursky, and asked them to give me an answer. "Perhaps you may know of their whereabouts?"

And they answered, "Dear Sofia Mikhailovna!"--I was already "Mikhailovna" on that identity paper. "I inform you that your husband is alive and well and is working as the director of a

school in Chkalov Oblast. The Germans were just here, or what was left of them. But the sisters are located there." But before they told me about my husband, before that they informed me that one of the sisters had been working in the censor's office in Buguruslan. She recognized my handwriting and begged her boss to open the letter. But he wouldn't allow it; there where she was sorting out those envelopes the censorship was very strict. She says, "I assure you that this is my sister-in-law." And so, when they opened it, and there it was, you understand, she telephoned my husband, and he didn't believe it. She said to my husband, "Yes, yes, I'll show you! Come down here, it's Sonia's handwriting!"

I had spelled out the address, and they sent to Orel a whole package including an entire novel of letters from everyone I knew who had been evacuated and who had been found. He had been looking for us everywhere. He had looked for us through the newpaper "Izvestia," through "Pravda," through all the newspapers, in the orphanages. He thought that maybe I was dead but that he might, perhaps, find the children. He searched for the children, so he had given their dates of birth, and their names and everything. And he had written one woman, a Sofia Moiseevna that he had read something about somewhere. So she wrote, "I'm not your wife. I am Sofia Moiseevna, but not Ginzbursky." It had occurred to him that maybe I had changed my last name.

He looked for us everywhere. No luck. Afterwards, when he found us--we still didn't get there right away--there wasn't any money. Potatoes cost 400 rubles a bag in that currency. I can't

remember whether someone gave us part of it, or whether we sold those--in brief we really had nothing, to be honest. I don't remember just why we had those potatoes; we sold those potatoes. No, I didn't sell the potatoes. I left them. She hadn't yet found her husband, and I had. So I left them for her. As well as all the children's things that they had on them--they had arrived naked and barefoot in general--those rubber-tire shoes, all that I left for her. I thought that since I had found my husband, I'd have everything. Well, after a long time she found her husband; she died. Her husband had someone else. Generally, her life with her husband didn't work out and she died. He took up with a Polish woman of some sort. But she used to come to see me in Leningrad. She would write me, "My dear sister"--she called me her sister. I left everything to her.

Naked and barefoot--oi--dirty, frightful, I met my husband. He sent us the money for the trip. Oh, that's the way it was. He sent us the money for the trip, but there was some money left and I bought potatoes. And I left her the money and everything else that I could. That's how my husband and I got together. That's all our story. Of course I've jammed it all together.

Later, when we arrived in Gomel, everything was fresh in my memory and everyone was writing about the Fascists. Erenburg was writing a lot at that time. So people would say to me, "Write to Erenburg. He'll print it in his journal." Well, I told about how interested everyone was, everyone I told about how I lived, and

how and where I was saved, about the crosses and everything. That's what I wrote to Erenburg.

Later we left Gomel for Leningrad, because there was no work in Gomel, and I had lived as a girl in Leningrad, I was in the orphanage there. I had two sisters there, but one was at the front--she's already
passed away--and the second was an evacuee in Chkalov. So we went first to Gomel, then to Leningrad, ran from pillar to post. There were no apartments, we lived in the railroad classification yard, then even farther out, until my husband found some kind of work. So I started writing under those impressions.

Oh, yes. I still haven't told you the finale. When I got to Chkalov to be with my husband, I had to get a passport. I went to the director of the passport desk. "What do you have?" I say, "Here's a German identity paper." "You were under the occupation?" I say, "Yes." "Oi, oi, oi, oi. Write a note of explanation telling how you received it, and then we'll issue you a passport." I sat down and wrote a long explanatory note. Well, I wrote something. When he had read it, he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You are a heroic woman; they'll be writing about you in the history books."

When when we got to Leningrad, they had already started not accepting everyone who had been under the occupation as residents. Everybody that had been under the occupation had a mark in his passport, some kind of triangle somewhere in the corner of some page. And so Leningrad was not accepting those

from the occupation. You understand? And people told me, "Do you want them to drive you away? Keep quiet!" So I let it go, and that's where it remained. That was the situation.

So that administrator said, "What nationality shall we give you?" He was so struck by me. He says, "Well, heroine, what nationality do you want? I'll give you whichever one you want." Because in the passport, in the German identity paper was written "Orthodox." I say, "Only Jewish, only. I'm not changing my nationality." Well, afterwards, of course, my children, didn't get into graduate school, my eldest, and the second couldn't get into an institute either--and he has finished two institutes. He is a poet, my Vitia. Viktor Gir. Do you know, "Talk with me, Mama," "Give women flowers," "Crimson dawn"?
They're all by my son. I have that collection--I didn't bring it. He is my poet. He is the editor of a local newspaper in Israel. Then he gives performances, gives his songs. Tolkunova sang them all, with Morozov. The first thing that she received--for "Talk with me, Mama"--was Honored Artist of the USSR. That was for that song. She kisses him and me, and we're on the best of terms. That's my poet and newspaper editor. Besides he finished a finance institute and the philological department at the university--the evening division, they wouldn't take him in the regular daytime courses. So, with great effort, since he was a poet, he enrolled in the evening division.

My eldest was the chief specialist for a construction institute. He has gotten himself a job, after two years. They've been in

Israel a year and a half. He got a job as an engineer, and his boss is very pleased with him. He writes simply that "I'm getting great pleasure from my work." This son has two girls studying at the university. The younger is a poet--I have a collection with her poems. And back in Leningrad she used to give concerts. She was already well known. The older girl is also at the university studying. They all write poetry. And I have yet another granddaughter who writes and a son, and my daughter writes such poems! Whenever anybody had a birthday at work, everyone used to ask her to write something. They all write poems. That's our life.

And then when they had to go, she didn't want to go to Israel, but the rest went to Israel. We thought that we wouldn't get here. They didn't wait long enought to get the invitation to emigrate and went to Israel. They were treating us terribly by then; one time they cut him off when they were on the radio, in Brezhnev's time, in Leningrad. Is that going to be on, too? Oh, no, don't.

Q: (inaudible)

A: That was in Brezhnev's time. Nevertheless later he travelled the whole country with his poetry, everyone knows him. And his opera is being performed now, "The Castle," based on Zweig. They already had the premiere in Petrozavodsk. And he wrote a chidren's fairy tale that they're broadcasting on television all the time. It's the story of Filofei the Cat. And my other one it's certain is also going to be a big man. He is a very good specialist engineer. One of my daughters-in-law is a doctor, the other is an

economist. She hasn't been able to get a job; the other one is in a hospital on half-time. My daughter works in the music field. As for great-granddaughters, I have two. One is in third grade, the other is three years old. That's our whole story.

Yes, I'm with my daughter, my daughter wanted to come here. In Israel, she said, she wouldn't be able to get a job, and there are no living quarters for two people, while her uncle and cousin gave us the official invitation and they let us in. But my children didn't wait long enough and left, and so we've wound up apart.

So he printed it in the newspaper, and from that newspaper they reprinted it here in the newspaper "Vzgliad." The issue for the 15th. I wrote that because the original has turned yellow, barely alive since '45. I didn't want to give the crosses away. And I sent it to Germany, but I doubt that anything will come of it. I wrote in it, "thanks to beloved Comrade Stalin and the Red Army"--they'll get a laugh out of that. But at that time you couldn't write a single word without mentioning Stalin's name. Well, that's it.

Oi, We went through a great, great deal. And I've told you only part, a little part of it. How many nuances there were, how many moments there were when, staring death in the face, if they should look at you the wrong way, you'd go right to the gallows. But we thought it would be better to be bombed to pieces, rather than to die at the hands of the Germans, those bloody murderers. It was better to let them bomb us, and so we were glad when the

airplanes flew around dropping bombs. Life to us was cheap. That's the way it was. That's all.

Q: I WOULD LIKE TO ASK SOMETHING MORE. (inaudible) SONIA LISITSKAYA, WAS THAT HER REAL NAME?

A: Glatman, Glatman.

Q: GLATMAN?

A: Yes. Sofia Zakharovna Glatman.

Q: AND HER CHILDREN'S NAMES?

A: Ira and Marik. And mine were Lyonia and Vitia.

Q: YES. AND IN WHAT YEAR WAS SHE BORN?

A: She was maybe a year older than I. She was born probably in '14 or '13.

Q: I'LL TAKE A LOOK (inaudible)

A: Please, please.

Q: I SIMPLY WANTED TO CHECK AT THE BEGINNING. SO YOUR PAPA WAS NAMED MOISEI?

A: Moisei Yakovlevich Rotin. My mama was his second. Her name was Khody, Gody--we called her Galia, I don't know--Abramovna. But my real mama's name was Kuznetsova, Yeva Abramovna. So Yeva is mine--Khava, they called her Khava. She was Khava.

Q: IT WAS YOUR MAMA...(inaudible)

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. She had me, and died when I was maybe 5 years old.

Q: THAT MEANS THAT YOUR MAMA WAS THE SECOND KHAVA?

A: No, she's the first Khava. Khava is my mama. I don't count the other one. We had left.

Q: AND WHEN WERE YOU BORN?

A: I was born on the 27th of December, '15. I am 76 years old and will be 77 at the end of the year. My daughter was born after the war. That's all. I am very attached to her; I didn't want to leave her alone if she didn't want to go to Israel--my children were calling for me to go there. But since she was going to remain alone, I decided to stay with her. Later the two of us came here.

Q: HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HERE?

A: Eight months. That's not long. She is studying the language, and is already doing all right, can understand a lot. Besides that she is studying computers. And she is trying to type in English. So that's how we're living; we're feeling lonely right now.

Q: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE GRANDFATHER YOU WERE SENT TO IN GOMEL?

A: Iliankiv Rotin.

Q: HE WAS A ROTIN?

A: Yes, Rotin. My papa was a Rotin and my name was Rotina, Sofia Moiseevna. But now I'm...Even in ZAGS [the Registry Office] I have a ZAGS certificate with "Sofia Moiseevna" written on it. When it was time for me to leave, there it was, "Sofia Moiseevna," while I had "Sofia Mikhailovna" on my passport. If that wasn't a bureaucratic mess! You're not going to tell just everybody how that happened. Oi, do you know, when--this won't be on television, will it?

R.G: No.

A: Before that German came with the dog, with the guard dog and that interpreter, I firmly believe in dreams--but not in cards. I

dreamt that I was in some barbwire enclosure--the Germans had everyone there behind barbed wire--that I was in a barbwire enclosure. How I got there I don't know. In the barn behind me was a red cow with horns. She picks me up on her horns, she's after me, and I go around and around, spinning all the time. And I see that she's lifting me on her horns. And suddenly I threw myself against that barbed wire so hard that I tore through it, scratched up my whole body, broke through the enclosure and jumped away from the wire. And do you know, that same day they came after us with the dog. It's simply amazing that I had that dream. And I became convinced when I left with the horses. Oi, how we cried when the train started off. My God! How little the children were! Oi. They aren't young any longer: my older son in 55, and the younger has turned 53. The girl now came after the war. That's all. Do you have any questions?

Q: (inaudible). FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD SIMPLY. HOW DID YOUR FAMILY LIVE? DID YOU OBSERVE JEWISH TRADITIONS?

A: Grandfather observed them all the time. And grandfather and grandmother used to tell me why they celebrated Purim, that we were....Grandfather always observed them. And in later years, Papa began to observe them, too; papa observed them, too, but only when he got elderly. So I lived with grandfather all the time, and went to Leningrad from grandfather's when I was 15. Because I had a step-mother. She drove everyone away, didn't want us. That was something, too. This won't be on television, will it?

R.G.: IT WILL BE ON FILM, AND FOR TELEVISION WE WILL SHOW A SMALL PROGRAM, AND ON TELEVISION IT'S VERY (INAUDIBLE). BUT LEAVE IT ON FILM AS IS, IT'S IMPORTANT, AFTER ALL.

A: Because I had no mama, yes.

Q: DID YOU FEEL THAT YOU WERE A JEWISH GIRL?

A: Yes, what else? They wouldn't take my son into graduate school. He is someone who really thinks clearly. He was a chess champion in the [Soviet] Union, got second place. He corresponded with people all over the world about chess. They didn't let him into graduate school...What was important was to be allowed to take the exams, somehow. And he passed everything with A's--even an A in English. How hard he worked! Didn't sleep nights! Then one time he came and saw that all his documents were in his mailbox with "rejected" written on them. They even sent someone specially to drop them off, because you can't send them by letter: there's an autobiography, transcripts, everything is there, health certificate, everything. So they put them in a folder and put it in his mailbox. They didn't accept him into graduate school.

And they didn't take the younger son for a job either, nor her. They told her point-blank: "What are you applying for? You know that they don't take Jews." Well, later it got easier. Afterwards. That's what they did.

Q: IN CHILDHOOD, IN YOUR CHILDHOOD--SINCE YOU WERE BORN IN '15...

A: Yes, yes.

Q: AS YOU GREW UP, DID YOU FEEL THAT YOU WERE JEWISH?

A: What else? All the time, what else? I felt it. Well, of course, when I lived in Leningrad with grandfather's wife, then there was no one.... But later, when I was already living with my husband, there were Jewish families who invited us to the first seder, to Rosh Hashana, we went to _____. And I used to fast every year. I swore an oath that, if I stayed alive, when I was under the Germans, if I survived, I would always fast during Yom Kippur, always. And since 1945--at that time I did not fast--I have always fasted. I don't know, I was even sick and still I fasted, always, to this very day. I fasted. It's a sign of the fact that the children and I remained alive. I've always fasted. And on that day I would go to the synagogue. In Stalingrad (Leningrad?) we have one large, beautiful synagogue. So I used to go each time, but I didn't go to Simhath Torah, the crowd there.... And to _____ I used to go in memory of papa, and I gave money to the synagogue, and went every year. And I fasted every year. Down to the present day, this year and everywhere, I've been fasting since I was under the occupation. But before the occupaton I did not observe [the rituals]. And on Saturdays I don't do anything, I don't wash, don't sew, I observe the traditions then, too. Well, I don't go to the synagogue because my leg hurts, and there's nobody to take me. And I don't speak American, and my daughter is busy, how can I? As it is she takes me to all the doctors. I felt it, what else? I feel it all the time. That's the situation.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR HUSBAND'S NAME IN FULL?

A: Boria. Boris was his name. Boris, that was his name.

Q: AND HIS PATRONYMIC?

A: Boris Abramovich. He was a mathematics teacher.

Q: BORIS ABRAMOVICH GINZBURSKY?

A: Ginzbursky, and I am Ginzburskaya; maiden name: Rotina.

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS HE BORN?

A: In '14. He died three years ago.

Q: IN LENINGRAD?

A: Yes. He died, died early. 73 years old. That's all. He worked a great deal; to feed three children he had to teach. All our children received higher educations. He had to work hard--I worked little because I stayed home raising the children. They are well-groomed, very fine, sensitive people. Everyone says flattering things about them. My children are very fine people, intellectuals. I didn't bring a photograph, you could have taken a look at them. They write often, but so what? I've gotten separated, I miss them, I can't [see] my granddaughters, great-granddaughters, the whole family, there are only the two of us. There's no one for me to socialize with, that's all. Uncle is an old man, he's 80 years old.

Q: I FORGOT TO ASK. YOU SURVIVED WITH YOUR CHILDREN, VITIA AND...

A: Lyonia.

Q: WHAT YEAR WAS VITIA BORN?

A: Vitia in '39, and Lyonia in '37. Vitia's was January 17, '39--he's 10 months, and Lyonia's was April 10, '37.

Q: AND YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW, WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A: My mother-in-law was Gisser, Liza Gorelik.

Q: (inaudible)

A: Yes, yes, yes. Ginbursky on my husband's side. She was a Gisser, but I don't know her patronymic.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED TO HER LATER?

A: She went to her relatives out in the country. At first everything was fine, they distributed the cows and everything. But when the German troops left, the SS came. They picked up all the Jews just the way they had in Gomel--except that this was a rural area, there weren't many--and killed them all.

Q: THEY KILLED THEM ALL. INCLUDING HER?

A: Including her. She was living with a nephew. She wrote for me to come there, that everything was fine and all. But I got talked out of it by Sonia, that woman I used to wash laundry with where all those refugees were. "Where are you going to go? Everywhere is the same as here, and they're going to be killing everywhere. We've already seen them taking the Jews off to be shot from the ghetto here." She says, "Don't go anywhere, there's no reason to go. Stay put, we have to slip away from here farther toward the front." I had wanted to cross over the front line, but they wouldn't take me with the children. So she [mother-in-law] went there for the holidays and wrote that things were fine with her, that I should come there, that they had everything and all. Everything was their own, their own cows and all. But then this woman talked me out of it, and I didn't go. If I had gone, the same

thing would have happened to me. It was fate, that's all. Really, I believe in fate, I believe in fate. Such is my destiny, that I was supposed to remain alive. How many times was I sick after that, on the point of death and everything, but I survived. Now it's only my daughter that I worry about.

Q: WHY?

A: If she could only get herself situated while I am alive.

R.G.: SHE'LL GET SITUATED.

A: That's all.

Q: YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW WENT TO HER NEPHEW'S. DO YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THAT NEPHEW?

A: I do. Oh, no, I don't know their name. I don't know the nephew. I do know that their son was at the front. He was the only one to survive: two sisters were killed--they were there--and his mother and father. He was alone at the front and survived. He lived with us after the war. He had nowhere else to go, and we took him in. Later he married and everything.

Q: AND WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

A: Lyova. Lyova Aronov.

Q: ARONOV?

A: Yes. He lives in Gomel now; he has two children, and the daughter has gone to America. I don't know where she is. She doesn't write to me; they don't write to us.

Q: YOU WERE SAYING THAT PEOPLE THERE USED TO LOOK AT VITIA. WAS THAT BECAUSE HE HAD CURLY HAIR?

A: He was not curly, I shaved him all the time. But his eyes were black. I used to tell him--he looked like a Jew, "Son, people are going to say to you that you are black. How come? You tell them that you look like the neighbor." I didn't know what to say. But when we were young we used to joke and everything. And that's what Vitia would say. One woman went up to him and said, "Vitenka, what a handsome little fellow you are, with eyes like cherries. Why do you have such black little eyes? Who do you look like?" He says, "Like the neighbor." Ha, ha, he didn't understand. They roared. That's the way we used to fend off such questions, with all kinds of answers.

It was terrifying when we were bombed. We all trembled. Our army bombarded continuously. And we were very glad. Maybe they'll capture us, maybe. We waited from minute to minute. And so many years have passed. They didn't take us. Our men, they all perished, so many people! One time we were at a little road crossing, just after we had run there from Belostok. A house stood there, a forester's house, a well-to-do house, with a kitchen garden and roosters and _____ and everything. They were walking around the garden. He himself had abandoned the house, because it stood in a forest glade. There was crossfire--ours and theirs were firing; our army was approaching, and theirs.... And you know you could see the flashes of the shells. The shells flew over the roof, over the roof. The house wasn't touched by either ours or theirs. We were astounded. There was a whole crowd of refugees there, military men, wives, and civilians of all kinds. And

how they bombarded! We thought the forest was exploding. And it all went high, over the house, over the house, and past it, that's how the shelling went. We were shaking; we thought it was the end. And then the shelling stopped. The Germans apparently had driven them off because the Germans appeared immediately and lit up everything with their spotlights.

So I was afraid that they would see my hair. I wrapped myself up in a blanket, I remember, like this. And later, when we found ourselves ringed by the Germans, I destroyed my documents. I had to, in order not to show them who I was. I threw them into the toilet.

Q: YOU THREW ALL YOUR DOCUMENTS INTO THE TOILET?

A: Yes, yes, yes. On the street. Yes, yes, yes, on the street.

Q: EVERYTHING? THE CHILDREN'S BIRTH CERTIFICATES AND EVERYTHING?

A: Yes, everything, everything, everything. I had a savings account booklet--my husband had left for Leningrad--to buy myself a fur coat.

Q: A FUR COAT?

A: Yes, yes. That account, if I had not thrown it away, after the war later I would have given it away to _____. So I threw that away too, because the name was there--"Ginzbursky"--many people spell it with a "g" in the middle. If I hadn't thrown them away--but I couldn't keep them. Where was I? That all. I destroyed it. Oi, it's cost me a great deal of health, all of it, all of it! When I went to the bazaar in Orel to buy those crosses. And I

bought them. They're such simple ones, aluminum. I put one on myself and on the children. Wore it all the time.

Q: AND SONIA LISITSKAYA, WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A: Lisitskaya--that was Glatman.

Q: GLATMAN, YES. DID SHE PUT THE CROSSES ON HER CHILDREN TOO?

A: We did all together, she and I did it together, yes, yes. And on ourselves. And I wore it all the time. When our troops came, I took it off. But I took them with me, and when the 40th anniversary of our victory came, we were celebrating, we always celebrate on the 9th of May, that's a second birthday. Mine is the 5th of August, when I was born again with the children. So we were celebrating on the 9th of May, everyone came to my place, the children, grandsons, great grandsons and everyone. And so on the 40th anniversary I gave it to each of them. I say, "You have a talisman, and here it is, the one you wore." And Vitia wrote me, "I am keeping my talisman." And Lyonia too. I have mine. I have mine, too, I have it here in America. So, that's all.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE ESCAPING FROM GOMEL WITH THAT OTHER FAMILY AND WITH THOSE OTHER PEOPLE, WERE THOSE PEOPLE JEWS OR NOT?

A: No. With what other people? I was only with that Sonia. She was a Jew, she told me herself.

Q: YES, SONIA, I UNDERSTAND.

A: Yes, and that was all; no one else was running away. As for those others--some left for the village. Only Masha, the one who

was just about to give birth, poor thing, even then she was sick--we don't even know whether she is alive. But others stayed there longer, they weren't picked up. Only she and I ran away together.

Q: THESE PEOPLE WHO RAN AWAY, WERE THEY SIMPLY REFUGEES, OR WERE THEY ALSO JEWS AND WERE AFRAID?

A: There was one Jewish woman, the one who was going to give birth, yes. But I don't remember about the others. I don't know because I remember them only faintly.

Q: OH, YES. DID YOU KNOW THAT THE GERMANS WERE TREATING THE JEWS SO BADLY?

A: Of course. No, when the war began, we didn't know.

Q: YOU DIDN'T KNOW?

A: Yes, but when that incident occurred, when we found ourselves in that forester's house and people started saying that....No, we knew even back in Poland that the Germans were exterminating the Jews in the 'thirties.

Q: YOU KNEW?

A: Yes, yes, how else? I am very interested in politics. I always read all the newspapers. Even before Leningrad I listened to everything, everything, from beginning to end, all the news, all the [TV program] "Fifth Wheel," that's what's her name--there, you see, I've forgotten. I'm current on all events. And so I knew everything. But when those [Germans?] came and started to...they collected the men on the spot and shot them out in the yard.

Q: JEWS, GENERALLY?

A: Yes, Jews, and there was also one Russian there that they shot. They didn't ask questions; they thought that they were waging, what's it called, a "Krieg."

Q: BLITZKRIEG?

A: Not "Blitz," but something else. And not "totalen," I've already forgotten. I used to know German so well. And they thought that it's already over, they had taken all Russia. And so, generally they didn't take the men right away, but shot them all, before Minsk. After Minsk and Bobruisk, there was a cul-de-sac where they got held up and they saw that it wasn't so easy. So then they started taking prisoners. And we gave them a diplomatic note saying, why are you killing [our men]? Well, we will kill yours, too. I knew all that. "Totalenkrieg," that was it. So--a quick war. Well, generally they stopped the killing. But that time when we were there, he hid on the second floor, and we women were all in one bunch. They looked at us carefully, and took them right out into the yard and shot them in our presence. We walked on the bodies. Oi, what a thing! So many of our [men], so many! There was simply nowhere to walk. We walked on the bodies--such young soldiers they were! It was a horror!

Than after the war, when we had such hopes for everything, began a terrible--already from '47 we felt, from '45 through '47, we felt a terrific antisemitism, Stalinist. We felt it already. They stopped accepting Jews in institutes, to say nothing about the university or the conservatory. My girls enrolled at the university in Jerusalem exclusively on their _____.

One, by the way, entered Leningrad Pedagogical, but how she got in is a whole saga, too. That was thanks to my Vitia. He sent them. And they were afraid, because this was now Gorbachov's time, the early period of perestroika. Well, we swallowed all that: they wouldn't let him into graduate school--a fine mind! And just where didn't he work! But he works at those duties that a graduate student ought to work at. He was supposed to be sent abroad once, to Japan. So they wrote, "We request that Mr. Ginzbursky be sent to us. He must advise us about something." So they sent his assistant, but not him. But he is the one who should have gone. There is a lot that could be told.

Earlier, they used to say to me, "Mama, why did you register us like that in our passports that time?"--when I was getting my passport. But I was burning inside with the desire to be precisely a Jew, that's all. Do you understand? Of course, they paid a heavy price for it, particularly Lyonia and Vitia. Vitia looks like [a Jew], but nevertheless, there was the document. As soon as they would look, (inaudible). They looked--she's not very like, and immediately refused to take on the job. She made the rounds [of offices], and enrolled thanks to various kinds of pull. There are decent people, some. Well, that's all.

Q: ARE YOU TIRED?

A: We're afraid that it'll be late tonight, it'll be dark and all, and it's 9 o'clock. I'd like to go home. I have to call a taxi.

R.G.: Very well. Thank you very much.

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