

With selected texts and
photographs from the
Centropa archive

For educators from
Georgia and Azerbaijan

TRANS 
HISTORY
A project by  **centropa**



Resource Collection on Jewish Life and Culture in the Caucasus

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Centropa’s activities in the Caucasus: The Trans.History Project

Since 2020, Centropa has been working within its interdisciplinary educational program Trans.History for educators and civil society actors on the topic of Jewish history in the 20th century and the promotion of civil society in Georgia. A year later, Centropa started its activities in Azerbaijan.

The aim of the Trans.History project is to teach educators and civil society actors about Jewish history and heritage in their region and to anchor it as an integral part of the multi-ethnic heritage in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Educational programs on Jewish history and culture, as well as the prevention of antisemitism, are currently very limited within the regular school curricula in Georgia and Azerbaijan, and are also minimal in the extracurricular context.

This means that Jewish history is not taught as an integral part of national Georgian and Azerbaijani historiography. Despite the centuries-old Jewish history of both countries, fear of contact and ignorance are still widespread in both countries and can serve as a breeding ground for the formation of antisemitic prejudices. This is where Centropa wants to close its gaps with the Trans.History project.

We are developing educational materials based on personal life stories in cooperation with the Creative Development Center in Georgia and the Resource HUB from Azerbaijan, which are made available free of charge and digitally.

Through knowledge transfer and international exchange between Georgian, Azerbaijani and German

participants, we can reduce prejudices. Therefore, Trans.History is organising two transnational training seminars for educators and civil society actors from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Germany, based on participatory engagement with Jewish life in the past and present, the construction of a balanced culture of remembrance, and challenging discrimination with innovative teaching materials.

Our seminars include lectures on the history and culture of the Jewish communities in Georgia, a guided tour of Jewish Kutaisi and Baku, panel discussions on Jewish-Non-Jewish relations and social integration of the Jewish communities in Georgia and Azerbaijan. There will also be workshops on capacity and awareness building, recommendations for action in the field of cultural engagement in remembrance and trilateral group work by participants from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Germany on the use of a resource pack created in the project cycle in an educational context.

Centropa’s engagement in the Caucasus takes the form of trilateral group works with participants from Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Germany, using a documentary film and the collection of materials created during the project cycle in an educational context, excursion to the Jewish settlements in Georgia and Azerbaijan. As part of the program, Centropa and their partners from Georgia and Azerbaijan are holding a youth competition in Georgia and Azerbaijan for students to create digital projects (films, graphic stories, social media projects) on the topic of “Jewish history of my town”.

About Centropa

Centropa was founded in 2000 with the goal of preserving Jewish memory in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, and the former Soviet Union by interviewing over a thousand elderly Jews still living between the Baltic and the Aegean. Between 2000 and 2009, Centropa digitized over 25,000 privately-held family photographs and personal documents all while recording their stories. Starting in 2005, Centropa began creating thematic websites, multimedia films, travelling exhibitions, educational programs, and illustrated

books, all based on our archival materials. In more recent years, Centropa has been producing documentary films, audiowalks, and podcasts. For more than 10 years now, materials on 20th century European Jewish history based on the interview and photo archives have been produced – for use in educational contexts and beyond. Centropa has conducted teacher training seminars and youth project competitions in 18 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.



The prayer of the missionaries (Feast of "Sukkot"), painting by Shalom Koboshvili, 1938, gouache on paper (Source: Wikipedia)

Jewish history of the Caucasus

Introduction

Georgia and Azerbaijan are two countries in the Caucasus² with a particular Jewish history which historically hosted various Jewish communities. While Georgia for many centuries has been a home to a very special community of Georgian Jews, Azerbaijan's most numerous Jewish community constituted Mountain Jewry with the largest population of Mountain Jewry in Eastern Caucasus. Nevertheless, the Jewish communities of the two countries had close ties over the course of history. Georgian Jews who migrated from Georgia for various reasons, including trade, settled in

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and created their own community there. Mountain Jews from various parts of what is today Azerbaijan migrated to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and created their own enclave in the city. Moreover, both countries have Ashkenazi Jewish communities, which appeared there simultaneously in the 19th century, coming predominantly from the Russian empire. Among the main factors facilitating the arrival of Ashkenazic Jewry³ to the region was the expansion of the Russian empire and, later on, the incorporation of the region into the Soviet Union and the internal

1 Shalom Koboshvili was a Georgian artist who specialised in drawings and paintings of Jewish life in Georgia.
2 Caucasus: Mountain system and region lying between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and consisting of the states of Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.
3 Ashkenazi Jews: European Jewry

migrations within the country. It should be noted that the period of World War II was a very special period for interethnic relations and for the Jewish population of the region. As a result of the war, an influx of refugees and evacuees resulted in the settlement of another wave of Ashkenazic Jewry in the Caucasus.

The process of evacuation of the civilian population and enterprises during the Second World War on the Eastern front (since the USSR entered the war) was ongoing, among others, through the territory of the South Caucasus – Georgia and Azerbaijan. The main evacuation route ran through the Black Sea ports of Georgia – Poti, Sukhumi and Batumi, and further by trains eastwards, through Azerbaijan (Baku) and the Caspian Sea to Central Asia. The Black Sea ports were mainly used for evacuation from the territory of Crimea, which was firstly the evacuation of enterprises, factories, cultural and educational organizations and their employees.

Another way led from North Caucasus through Dagestan and Azerbaijan, and then Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Moreover, trains with evacuees used to enter the

territory of Georgia from the North Caucasus, primarily from Dagestan, through Azerbaijan. Often this was the re-evacuation of the population and enterprises previously evacuated from the territories of Bessarabia, Ukraine and Belarus to the North Caucasus.

Spontaneous groups of refugees arrived on the territory of Georgia and Azerbaijan in various ways through the Caucasus mountains. The destinations of the evacuees were very different – some were sent to Central Asia after spending a while in the Caucasus, some left the Caucasus at the end of war, and some stayed in the region after the War. Nevertheless, the creation of the state of Israel and the political developments of the second half of the 20th century, including the dissolution of the Soviet Union and military conflicts in the region, resulted in gradual decline of the Jewish life and the number of Jewish population in the Caucasus. The main factor that influenced this was the migration to Israel, where Georgian and Mountain Jews often create their own communities and maintain their language and culture brought from Georgia or Azerbaijan.



Tbilisi in XIX century, view from Metekhi plateau to "Rike" street during the 1893 flood (Source: Dmitri Yermakov/State Archives of Georgia/Wikimedia Commons)

Georgia

Georgian Jewry is one of the oldest diaspora communities in the world, dating back to first centuries B.C. E. Local historians argue that the Jews settled in the territory of Georgia already between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C. E.

According to Georgian chronicles of the 11th century, for example - "Kartlis Tskhovreba" and the Life of St. Nino – the first Jews came to the territory of Kartli (one of the Georgian principalities, which is part of today's Georgia) and settled there during the destruction of the first temple in the 6th century before the new era. According to legend, the Jews living in Mtskheta (the ancient capital of Georgia 25 Km west of Tbilisi) also brought Christianity and the first Christian relics to Georgia, and the Svetitskhoveli cathedral in Mtskheta, which until recently was the main cathedral in Georgia, was built on the site of the death of Sidonia, a Jewish woman who converted to Christianity, at the moment when her brother brought the tunic of Christ to Georgia.

Nevertheless, the first material evidence that Jews lived on the territory of Georgia, namely, in Mtskheta and Urbnisi, refers only to the first centuries of the new era. In archaeological excavations of the ancient necropolis of Samtavro in Mtskheta, carried out back in 1872 (Bayern) and in 1938, two tombstones with Hebrew inscriptions

dating back to 4–5 centuries new era were found.

Historically Jewish population created its enclaves in the entire territory of Georgia. Nevertheless, with changes in economy, borders and the main trading roads Jewish population has left some of the country's territories and concentrated in the main trading centres located alongside the main current transport roads.

The 19th and the 20th centuries has become the time when, in addition to the Georgian Jewish population, Ashkenazic and Mountain Jewish communities settled in the territory of Georgia.

By 1801, when Georgia was incorporated into the Russian Empire, Georgian Jews already constituted an integral part of Georgian society with their own niche as traders in the country's economy and their unique culture and traditions. The incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire resulted in gradual arrival of Ashkenazi Jewry from other parts of the empire. Simultaneously, the Russian legislation restricting the rights of the Jews became applied to Georgian territory. It has been ascertained that the Georgian Jews were acculturated, but not assimilated in Georgia. The community did not develop any separate language like Yiddish⁴ or Ladino⁵, but spoke (and still speaks) Georgian.

4 Yiddish language, one of the many Germanic languages that form a branch of the Indo-European language family. Yiddish is the language of the Ashkenazim, central and eastern European Jews and their descendants.
5 Ladino language, also called Judeo-Spanish, is a Romance language spoken by Sephardic Jews living mostly in Israel, the Balkans, North Africa, Greece, and Turkey.



Georgian Jews of Tbilisi, 1803 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Neftchiler Avenue in Baku, 1918–1920 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Azerbaijan

The main centres of Jewish culture and history in Azerbaijan are Quba, Oguz and Shirvan, as well as Baku. Historically, the eldest and the most numerous Jewish community in Azerbaijan is Mountain Jews. However, Ashkenazic and Georgian Jewish communities who settled in the country in the 19th–20th centuries are also present.

The Mountain Jewish community of the town of Quba, or Krasnaya Sloboda, in the North of Azerbaijan dates back to the 18th century. The town of Quba is quite well situated – on a large trading way, between mountains and a valley, in the middle of a fruitful agrarian area. The khans of Quba created a Jewish suburb near the capital, providing Jews with the land and giving the guarantees of safety. The town of Quba is divided by the river in two parts: on the right river bank there is the Muslim town and on the left bank the Jewish suburb (which was named Krasnaya Sloboda, Red Suburb, since 1926). Administratively, Krasnaya Sloboda is a separate settlement and its uniqueness is the fact that it's basically a mono-national settlement. Historically, only Mountain Jews lived in the settlement, with very few contacts between its inhabitants and the inhabitants of Quba.

It is not clear when first Jewish settlers came to Quba, but Krasnaya Sloboda was established as a separate settlement in the 18th century when Quba khans started to patronise the Jewish inhabitants of Quba. Jews came to Quba from nearby villages and towns, and those coming from the same area would create their own quarters – makhallas – inside of Krasnaya Sloboda with its own synagogue or a couple of synagogues. The dwellers of Sloboda know till now which quarter they come from. The place origin of the dwellers from various quarters of Sloboda was mirrored in their occupation. For instance, the descendants of mountain peasants were occupied with agriculture while those who came from Persia became an important part of tradesmen. In the mid 19th century – beginning of the 20th century Krasnaya Sloboda was the largest settlement of Mountain Jews in the East Caucasus and in Azerbaijan, with the population growing from about 5 thousand in the mid-19th century to about 8,5 thousand in the first quarter of the 20th century.

Oguz (formerly known as Vartashen) is situated on the main road from Baku to Tbilisi and used to have a large Jewish minority. The Jewish population settled there at the end of the 17th century coming from Persia. By the

19th century, the Jewish population constituted around 1/3 of the population of the town, reaching about 2200 people by the end of the 19th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, the Jewish population significantly decreased due to the migration to larger cities. Among other destinations, the local Jews moved to Tbilisi. At that time, Tbilisi was already a center of attraction for different cultures.

The Jewish community of Baku also dates back to the 18th century, when a Jewish enclave was created in the North of the city. At first it was a small community which almost disappeared as the result of a blood libel in the 1820s. However, by the end of the 19th century both Mountain Jewish and Ashkenazi communities were present in the city – and Baku's Jewish population is predominantly Ashkenazi.

By the 1920 Jewish population of the city was about 13700 people, 10 % of whom were Mountain Jews. The census of 1959 showed 29716 Jews in Baku, predomi-

nantly Ashkenazi, with Mountain and Georgian Jews as minority groups.

It should be mentioned that Mountain Jews, who historically constituted the majority of Azerbaijan's Jewish population are a separate group different from both Ashkenazic and Georgian Jewry. This group has arrived to the Caucasus region from Persia and, due to long-lasting coexistence with Muslim culture, it has a lot of Muslim influences. Mountain Jews speak Juhuri, or Judeo-Tat language, which has similarities to Persian.

While Georgian Jews and Mountain Jews are separate groups, completely different from each other, a number of qualities make it interesting to look at these groups in comparative perspective. The influence of the local non-Jewish culture and traditions, the more traditional and less secularised way of life, and strong community ties are characteristic of both of these groups, making them different from Ashkenazi Jewry arriving in the region in the 19th–20th centuries.



Class held at a primary Mountain Jewish school in Quba, early 1920s (Source: Wikimedia Commons, A. Naor, eleven.co.il)



Caucasian Jews with Chokha, photographed by Raul v Odessie (Source: NYPL Digital Gallery / Wikimedia Commons)

Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and the Evacuation to the East

When the Nazis were elected to power in Germany in 1933, as per their ideology, they blamed the Jews for Germany's mistakes and the poor economic and social situation in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the First World War. This surge of antisemitism was not entirely new: for a long time, Jews had been blamed for diseases, the social imbalance in society, and for murdering Christians in the blood libel myths.

For centuries, the Catholic Church had also accused the Jews of killing Jesus. The Nazis accused the Jews of having a vast amount of power. They hated the Soviet Union because they believed it was controlled by the Jews, whilst also believing Jews were 'dirty capitalists'.

On the 1st September 1939, the German Wehrmacht and SS invaded Poland. First, Jews were segregated by the German authorities. They had to wear the yellow star that marked them as Jewish and in 1940, the Jews had to move into ghettos, where they lived under inhumane conditions.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union on the 22nd of June 1941, the Germans started organizing the Holocaust on a larger scale. The deportation of Polish Jews and Jews from Western Europe to concentration and extermination camps began. There, they were murdered with car engine exhaust fumes and later with Zyklon B.

The Holocaust in the invaded and occupied areas of the former Soviet Union was different. The Wehrmacht combat units were accompanied and supported by SS death squads, local police and the German Security Police, whose mission was to murder all Jews, regardless of their age and gender.

Most Jews were shot by Germans and their allies not far from the cities, towns, and villages, where they had lived before the war. Others were murdered in gas vans in hundreds of localities in the North Caucasus. Several thousand Jews from Western and Central Europe were deported to the cities of Minsk, Kaunas, and Riga, and in Estonia. There, they were murdered by Germans and their local collaborators.

Shortly after the German invasion, the order of the evacuation and sheltering of people was determined. Priority in evacuation was given to workers of evacuated factories, families of Red Army and State Security commanders, families of military personnel, and children.

Even before the Germans arrived in regions such as Western Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia, local collaborators prevented the escapees from leaving and brought them home by blocking the roads. The ones who had the best chance of survival were those who made it onto the trains. These trains headed East under constant fire from the German military and SS. Up to 17 million citizens were evacuated to the east of the Soviet Union, including between 1.2 and 1.4 million Jews.

Despite this, there was no official Soviet policy to save the Jews. It was more often the result of Jews realising the danger of their situation, due to rumours about what was happening to Jews in the Nazi-occupied territories. Thus, many began to flee on their own. The Caucasus, Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia became destinations for civilian flight or evacuation, including many Jews from Soviet Ukraine and Belarus, who were evacuated primarily to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Introducing Centropa Stories

Prologue

Between 2000 and 2009, Centropa interviewed 1,230 elderly Jews still living in the 15 countries between the Baltic, Aegean, and the Caucasus. Centropa did not conduct interviews in North America, Israel or other centers of European-Jewish immigration. The goal was to create a database of Jewish memory, based entirely on the stories of those Jews who remained in the region.

Our interviewers spent up to a dozen hours with each respondent, and we asked them to tell us stories about their entire lives – from tales of growing up in the 1920s to stories about their grandchildren in the early 2000s. All Centropa interviews have been audio taped, digitized, and transcribed.

We have translated over a thousand of the interviews into English and 240 are available in Hungarian or German, with others accessible in Polish, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Polish, and other languages.

There is a story to every picture and detailed questions were asked about the ancestors, their professions, schools and, above all, about everyday life and the world of their childhood. Although the experiences during the Holocaust are recorded, the main focus is also on the time before and after the Second World War.

Centropa invites historians and graduate students to contact us to access the original word-for-word transcriptions or listen to the audio files, as 34 master's and PhD students have done since 2005.

Stories from Azerbaijan

Amalia Blank

→ centropa.org/en/biography/amalia-blank

Amalia was born in Rzeszów, Poland, in 1910. After fleeing Poland and its pogroms as a child, she grew up in Berlin before emigrating back to the USSR to study at drama school. While there she married, and finally was assigned to the Jewish theatre in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, with her husband. During the war they were forced to evacuate and lived in various places where she worked as an actress and teacher. In 1976 Amalia moved to Tallinn, where she met her second husband, Boris.

“ This is me in a performance at the Jewish theater in Baku, playing the part of the boy Iosele in the play of the same name. The photo was taken in 1936. I entered the 2nd course of the school right away, so I studied only for three years. In 1936 I was to graduate and get my diploma. I had two parts: Laurencia in ‘The Sheep’s Spring’ and several parts from one-act plays by some modern actors. I played the part of the strumpet. What a combination Laurencia and a trollop. A large board was to grade the graduation performance and right after their discussion we were supposed to get a mandatory job assignment.⁶ Finally I was called into the director’s office. Mikhoels⁷ and the members of the board were sitting there. Somebody from the commission said that my mandatory job assignment was at the Moscow Jewish theater. I turned it down. I said if I were younger, I would welcome it. I was 26. I would play the parts: ‘the food is served’ for a year or two, then I would have the parts with a couple of phrases and then I would get old until I had real roles.

I thanked the board for the estimation of my work and asked them to send me to any city, even to a provincial theater, where I would get main parts or any more important parts for that matter. Where I would have a



Amalia Blank in 1936 (Source: Centropa)

chance, to try, to learn from my mistakes and become an actress. Mikhoels kept silent.

What could he say in objection? I was right. I made my choice deliberately. There were 13 Jewish theaters in the Soviet Union and I was assigned to the Jewish theater in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku.

My husband asked for the same mandatory job assignment. Both of us left: a budding producer and a budding actress. Our common debut was in the theater

⁶ Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.
⁷ Yiddish actor, director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, chair of the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Mikhoels was murdered in 1948 by order of Stalin, initiating the beginning of the anti-Semitic campaigns in the former USSR.

in Baku. I played the main part in this performance. The play was called 'Iosele.' I don't remember the playwright. It was a touching drama about the life of a poor boy from a poor Jewish town. I played the part of the boy, Iosele. After that performance, which was a success, my husband told me that I was gifted enough to work in the theater without his assistance, so that

nobody would blame me for being treated preferentially since I was the producer's wife. So, he would not give me any parts. He wanted me to show my capabilities for other producers to see me and offer me to work with them. That's the way it was and I understood that he was right. That decision eliminated all kinds of intrigues regarding both of us."

Galina Natarevich

→ centropa.org/en/biography/galina-natarevich

Galina was born in 1941 during the evacuation of Molotov (now Perm). She was raised by her mother, a famous ballet dancer from Baku, as her father perished at the front in 1943. After graduating, she attended the Mukhina Art School's textile factory. She married another artist in 1967 and had one son in 1971.

“ This is my grandfather, Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, in the role of the groom in the silent film 'In the Name of God.' The film was shot in 1926 in Baku.

Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, was born in 1885 in Astrakhan. It is a region on the Caspian Sea, near Baku. As a grandson of a Nikolai's soldier⁸ he was granted a delay from military service and many other privileges, because a standard term of service in the imperial army was 25 years.

By the age of 22 Iosif finished the grammar school named after Alexander III in Baku. But it took him some effort to graduate, he encountered big problems there. Once he asked why he had received a mark lower than he actually deserved, and he was told that he was a bloody Yid.

And he was ready to fight with the offender. He was expelled and had to go to Tiflis (today Tbilisi, Georgia), to some Georgian Duke, who supervised all the education in that region, to ask, to implore, and to submit an application on his reinstating in that grammar school. He had to pass many examinations as an external student, not attending lectures. Therefore his education was a little bit stretched out in time.

However, by 1907–08, all these problems were resolved. He had finished grammar school, and he was even permitted to go abroad, where he was hoping to obtain university education.

The Baku municipal council approved his departure, and the head of administration had signed the appropriate certificate in the Yiddish language, for which you were supposed to pay a tax of 75 kopecks back then.

In 1908, Iosif entered the University in Munich. He graduated from the medical faculty of that university, attended lectures in other universities besides Munich, in particular, the University in Halle and the Berlin University. Among other lectures, he attended those of Professor Virhoff, a well-known scientist in medical circles. Iosif's thesis was typed and published in German, a language he knew perfectly, and his diploma was a very significant work.

And in spite of the fact that he had received his education in a solid European university, Iosif returned from Munich to Petrograd⁹, where he was assigned to carry out medical service in the hospital of Prince Oldenburgsky.

8 He was a grandson of a Soldier, who served in the Tsarist Army of Nicholas I. of Russia
9 Name of St. Petersburg during WWI and till 1924.

In 1917 he married Sara Yankelevna Shamesh in Petrograd, and left with her for Baku. Then he went to pass examinations in Kharkov to obtain a degree of an ordinary doctor. He later received a rank of therapist in Kharkov, and returned to Baku. There Iosif supervised commodity warehouses, performing the duties of a sanitary doctor, examining the goods that were transported from Baku and back, for signs of any infections. He sometimes went to Persia with his wife. In summer, as a rule, Iosif went for medical practice to Azerbaijan and Khasavyurt (in Northern Caucasus).



Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh in 1926 (Source: Centropa)

Alongside working as a sanitary doctor, he was also in charge of reception of patients. As he was a therapist, people of different nationalities came to see him. Grandfather spoke Azeri and Armenian. Azeris (being mostly Muslim), as well as Jews, are prohibited to eat pork. Among them were tuberculosis patients and Granddad had to treat them somehow, and there were no medicines then, and it was necessary to give the patients fat food, not only mutton. Grandfather would make pork balls and give these to them, not telling them what they were eating. God forbid them from finding out what kind of medicine that was! So he tried to treat them by and large. But afterwards, when one patient had almost recovered, Grandfather confessed to him, and they say he felt sick and vomited. I don't know if it's true or not. But anyway, there was such a story.

Despite his obesity, grandfather Iosif was a very mobile man. He willingly and gracefully danced. Very many people in Baku knew him not only as a perfect doctor, but also as a man with an inherent artistic talent. No wonder he was invited to take part in the shooting of a

feature film. Grandfather was a very artistic, pliant man, he danced easily, despite his corpulence, and was an easy-going man in general. He was invited to act in a movie. Films were silent then. He was cast in the role of a groom in a silent movie called 'In the Name of God,' shot in Baku in 1926. Then, after he moved to Lenin-grad¹⁰, before the war, he acted in two films: 'Peter the First' and 'The Girl Sets off for a Rendezvous.'

During his whole life Grandfather was a very religious man. The Soviet power was officially established in Baku in 1922. Observation of all customs – celebrating Pesach and Rosh Hashanah – was permitted, but was supposed to be done privately, in someone's apartment. It was allowed to visit the synagogue. But it wasn't encouraged. I remember very well that Grandfather used to put on a silk hat, a kippah¹¹, when he prayed. In everyday life he didn't wear a kippah, as far as I remember, because it would have given away his Jewishness to other people, and this was in the Soviet times. He was a medical doctor and worked among atheists."

10 Name of St. Petersburg from 1924 to 1991
11 A Jewish skullcap known as a yarmulke or kippah

Elena Glaz

→ centropa.org/en/biography/elena-glaz

Elena Glaz was born an only child in Leningrad, Russia, in 1930. Her grandfather was from Gyandzha (now Ganja). During the war, she evacuated with her mother to the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, but they returned to Leningrad in 1943 upon her father's invitation. Her family remained secular in their beliefs but subscribed fully to the tenets of Stalin's communism. After graduating, Elena became an engineer and married in 1974.

“ My paternal grandpa, Emmanuel Efimovich Glaz, was a winemaker. He produced wine, cognac, pure alcohol, and champagne. For his champagne he obtained a gold medal in Italy.

He didn't have an estate of his own, but worked as a hired winemaker for German colonists in the village of Dusseldorf.

It was thirty kilometers away from Gyandzha (formerly also known as Elizavetpol and Kirovabad) in Azerbaijan. He got there from Odessa, where he also was a winemaker.

In Dusseldorf his family was renting a big house; they had a vineyard, a large farm: hens, geese, lambs. Grandpa's family was large. There were seven children in it: 3 boys and 4 girls. About 1931 my grandpa moved his son – my father – to Leningrad, and brought a lot of wine produced by him. The last bottle of his wine we had drunk in 1974, at my wedding.

Grandpa lived with us for two years, died at 62 and was buried in the Transfiguration cemetery (the Jew-



Emmanuel Efimovich Glaz in 1926 (Source: Centropa)

ish one). I was 3 at that time. My daddy told me that grandpa loved me very much. My paternal granny was a housewife. She was a semi-literate woman. It seems to me that her name was Elka. They said that after the revolution she and grandpa were going somewhere by train, on the way granny fell ill with typhus, at one station she was taken off the train and died there.”

“ My father Josef was born in 1892 in Dusseldorf. He finished secondary school (common, not Jewish) and, odd as it was, sang in a choir of some Orthodox church. In Russia it was hard for a Jew and, what was more, from the Caucasian region, to enter an institute. So after finishing secondary school father went away to Berlin and entered the Medical Institute there in 1911.

As grandpa had a big family, which he could hardly support, my father had to pay both for his living and study. He worked as a bartender; in other words, sold beer in a bar.

Unfortunately, my father didn't succeed in completing his study in Germany. In 1914, as everybody knows, World War I burst out and all Russian nationals were sent away from Germany. My father arrived in Kyiv and entered the medical department of the Kyiv State University. He graduated from it in 1917. At that university he met my mum.

There were, as I was told, seven kids. The eldest daughter Eva was married to a man, who for some time was a captain on ocean-going ships and then became a winemaker.

He was the chief winemaker in Kishinev after the war and used grandpa's recipes, which had gotten into his hands in a way obscure to me. The second daughter Ida lived her whole life in Gyandzha, working in the post-office as a telegraphist. She had two sons. The name of the younger son was Rudolf, he was a trumpet player (I don't know where he performed), and the elder was called Boris. I heard Boris was a ruffian. I don't know whether Ida had a husband. Even Rudolf, when he visited me several times, never mentioned his father. Most likely, he deserted Ida and children.

The third daughter Adele got married being very young – at her 18 – and gave birth to a child and died in childbed. Her daughter, who was also named Adele in her honour, was given shelter by Roza, the younger daughter of granny and grandpa.

Roza had graduated from a high school and was a dentist in a governmental polyclinic in Tashkent. She died when she was over eighty years old. When she took this baby Adele, she was pregnant herself and soon gave birth to son Evgeny.

The eldest son Efim graduated with honours from the Polytechnical Institute in Rome. Then he lived in Baku and during his whole life worked as a mechanic in the Baku oil fields. Efim fluently spoke, read and wrote in Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani.

The youngest son Alexander at a young age was fond of going to mountains with friends and grilling shashliks. His friends were mostly Azerbaijanians. In Dusseldorf there were a few Jews, but many Azerbaijanians and Germans, because there were a lot of German settlements in the Caucasus.

Alexander was a very good administrator. Before the war, during the war (in 1941–1945), and after the war he worked in some company as a supplier. His wife was called Roza, she was Jewish. They had two sons: Lyonya and Edik. After the war Alexander with his family lived in the town of Chernovtsy (today: Chernivtsi, Ukraine).”

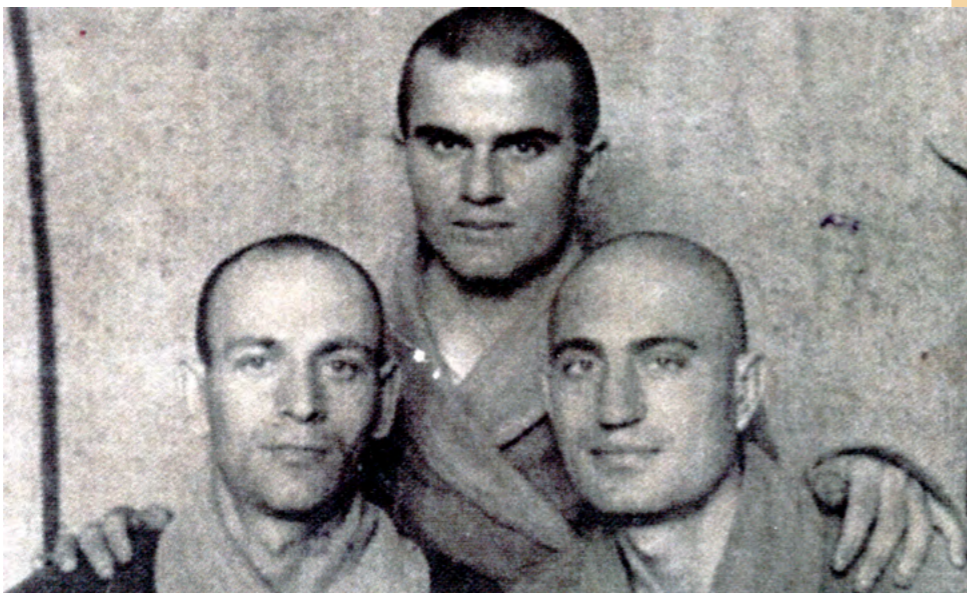


Yosef Glaz in 1909 (Source: Centropa)

Faina Minkova

→ centropa.org/en/biography/faina-minkova

Faina was born in 1949 in Chernovtsy, Russia (today Chernivtsi, Ukraine). She was raised secularly as a fervent communist, and emigrated to Leningrad (today St. Petersburg) after graduating to study at the Polytechnic Communications Institute. She married in 1975 and had one daughter, Nina. Although she experienced much antisemitism in her life, today she makes a point of celebrating the Jewish holidays at home and attends Hesed¹² events in her city.



Yuzik Minkov in 1943 (Source: Centropa)

“ My father Yuzik Minkov (on the left) and his comrades that he stayed in hospital with. The photo was taken in Baku in 1943. My father wanted to send this photograph to my mother, but he couldn't find her. In 1938 my father was sent to the Party's advanced training course for political officers in Mogilyov. He was rarely at home at that time. After his training my father got an assignment with the NKVD¹³ Special Department in the army. He became a professional military. This happened before the war with Finland¹⁴. My father went to the front. He was wounded and had his toes frost-bitten. He had to stay in hospital for a while. After he was released he got a job in Kamenets-Podolskiy in Ukraine. My mother and Elizabeth followed him. On 22nd June 1941¹⁵, my father was taking a course in medical treatment at a sanatorium. He was taken from the sanatorium to the front. He was a political officer and an NKVD employee. He was appointed a SMERSH¹⁶. But my father wasn't just a clerk sitting in the office. He spent a lot of time at the frontline where he was severely wounded in 1942. He had multiple wounds on his chest, abdomen, arms and legs. He was lying on the ground for over six hours. There was a German sniper on a tree.

A star on my father's cap reflected sunrays and the sniper kept shooting until it got dark. Only then my father's comrades got a chance to get him out of there. He was taken to a hospital behind the lines in Baku where he had surgery. It was a miracle that he survived. He had his ribs removed on one side and there were big scars on his chest. He lost a lot of blood. He was in constant pain. There were no analgesics available, and his doctor gave instructions to nurses to give him alcohol anytime he would wake up. Later my father never drank alcohol. He used to say that he had had too much alcohol. My father stayed in hospital from December 1942 till February 1944. Then he was sent to the Caucasus to complete his treatment.

He didn't have any information about his family. He didn't even know about the baby. It took him two years to find his family. He got information in 1944 saying that they were in the Ural. The same year he returned to his military unit at the front. In 1945 my father got an assignment in Japan and then in China.¹⁷

¹² Jewish welfare organisation for elderly people
¹³ NKVD used to be the soviet intelligence service, later KGB, today FSB
¹⁴ Soviet-Finnish War 1939–1940

¹⁵ Beginning of the German-Soviet War, also known on the territory of the former USSR as the Great Patriotic War 1941 to 1945

¹⁶ Acronym for 'Death to Spies', internal security service division

¹⁷ 1945, after the capitulation of Germany, the Soviet Union took part in the war against Japan in China

Sarra Nikiforenko

→ centropa.org/en/biography/sarra-nikiforenko

Sarra was born in Krivoy Rog, Russia (also: Kryvyi Rih, today in Ukraine), in 1909, the fifth daughter in her family. Her family spoke only Yiddish at home and celebrated all the high holidays. After finishing school in 1926 she attended Smela's College of Food Industry, and married in 1930. She and her husband had three children and later emigrated to Kharkov. After the war their family lived in Lviv, and Sarra was a housewife. Her parents and siblings all emigrated to Baku.

“ My mother Enta Zelyonaya with her little grandson Vitalik Zelyony, the son of my younger brother Boris Zelyony. The photo was taken in Baku in 1940 and sent to me in Kharkov so that I could see my nephew.

In 1931 my parents moved to Baku where my brother Solomon resided. He always said this was a nice and hospitable town and there was always a lot of food. There were no problems with getting a place to live or a job in Baku. There was a big Jewish community and a synagogue in the town. Gradually all of my relatives moved to Baku. There is a big area at the Jewish cemetery in Baku where my relatives were buried.

Baku stands on the Caspian Sea, and is the center of the oil industry that enriched this town at the beginning of 20th century. The town is located 2700 km from Kyiv.

My parents had neighbours of all nationalities: Azerbaijan, Armenian, Russian and Jewish. They were friendly with each other and felt comfortable speaking their own languages. When my father went to synagogue all non-Jewish neighbours greeted him with Jewish holidays. My mother treated them to some Jewish food and they treated us to their traditional food.

My father often wrote to me from Baku. He wrote about my brothers, sisters and their children. They got used to the town, only they were ageing and were in their

¹⁸ Jewish Religious school



Sarra Nikiforenko's mother Enta Zelyonaya and nephew Vitalik Zelyony in 1940 (Source: Centropa)

late 80s. My father wrote in Russian very well. In 1940 my father died and my mother went to live with my sister Sonia. My mother died in Baku in 1944.

I remember my brothers and sisters very young. They went to Baku in 1930–1932. I saw each of them two or three times afterward. We mainly communicated through letters.

Solomon, the second son, was born in 1885. He studied at Cheder¹⁸ and was as fond of equipment as his brother. At the beginning of the 20th century industry was accelerating in the south of Ukraine (that belonged to Russia at that time). There were many vacancies and the origin didn't matter for employment – industrious work was important. Solomon went to work at an iron ore mine. A number of iron ore mines were linked to form a long and strange town named Krivoy Rog. Solomon was smart and was appointed a foreman. He told his parents to join him there thinking that life would improve in this new location. Once he was called to the

office and while he was away from the mine there was a landslide resulting in fatality of the whole crew. My brother never descended to a mine again. He returned to Smela.

This happened in 1912. In Smela he married his cousin Basia, uncle Isaac's daughter. They had a daughter. Her name was Rachel. In 1929 Solomon and his family moved to Baku. There were no other means of communications, but correspondence at that time. They wrote occasionally and we knew that Solomon became a joiner at a kerchief factory and lived in an apartment that he rented from an Azerbaijan family. He worked at a kerchief factory. He died of a heart attack at the age of 90. His wife also died a long while ago. Their girls (there was another daughter born in Baku – I don't remember her name) moved to Israel a long time ago and there was no contact with them.

My older sister Basia, born in 1888, was educated at home. My sisters had Jewish teachers. I remember that they were old men wearing yarmulkes and poorly dressed. Our mother always gave them a meal and some food to go.

I don't know whether they received money for their work. They had 2–3 classes per week where they taught them to write and read in Russian and Yiddish, basics of mathematics, literature and Jewish traditions. Basia married Grisha, a Jewish young man living in our street. I remember their wedding and my other sisters' weddings with a rabbi. The wedding took place

19 A Jewish wedding canopy with four open sides. A Jewish wedding ceremony is typically under a chuppah
20 The Great famine from 1932 to 1934 in the SU, especially in Ukraine, south Russia and Kazakhstan

in a blooming orchard in spring. The chuppah¹⁹ was a beautiful shawl tied to blooming cherry tree branches. Grisha was a nice and hardworking Jewish man, he worked at the mill in Smela. They had a good life – they loved each other – together and had two boys: Syoma and Zyunia. They moved to Baku in 1930 following Solomon's family. They died there in the late 1960s. Their children became engineers. They live in Ber Sheve in Israel now. We rarely hear from them, they live their own lives.

My other sister Bronia, born in 1892, was married to Shymon who was a bookbinder. They had a son. His name was Grisha. I don't remember whether they had other children. They moved to Baku during the famine of 1932.²⁰ I can't remember when they passed away.

Sister Sonia, born in 1895, was a great housewife. She and her husband Grigory, a Jew, lived near us in Smela. Their daughter Sarra, my grandmother's favourite, was a beautiful girl.

Sonia helped mother with the house and Grigory learned the profession with my father. He was a good specialist, but not as good as my father. They moved to Baku with my parents in 1931. Sonia died in 1973. I have no information about her daughter Sarra.

Sister Polia, born in 1905, had the same teachers and had learned the same languages at home before the revolution, but afterward she attended a secondary school for several years. Polia married Boris, a Jewish

man, cinema operator and a very nice man. All Jewish young people knew each other and got married based on their affections and preferences. Their daughter Rachel was born in 1928. In 1932 they moved to Baku following other relatives. Boris perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War²¹. My sister was a widow, - she didn't remarry, but she had support from the family in Baku. She died in 1981. I don't remember my sister's husband's last name. I am 93 and I am surprised I remember anything at all.

My youngest and favourite brother Berele (he was called Boris at home) was born in 1907. He studied at a Soviet Jewish school. There were national schools opened in town during the Soviet period: Ukrainian and Jewish schools. There was the same curriculum at those schools where children studied geography, mathematics, history and other basic subjects and the only difference was the language of teaching: Ukrainian in Ukrainian schools and Yiddish – in the Jewish school. All teachers were Jews in the Jewish school.

All schools were Soviet-oriented. We were taught to love the Soviet power and be atheists. Then he finished Food Industry College. He worked at sugar factories. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War he moved to our parents in Baku. He married a nice Jewish girl (I've never seen her since they lived in Baku, and can't remember her name). They had a son – Vitalik. Boris perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. His son died of some disease during the war.

21 The Great Patriotic War is a Soviet term for the German-Soviet War between 1941–1945, which is known in the West as the Second World War.

In 1932 my older daughter Ludmila was born. In his letters Vitaliy talked me out of returning to Ukraine. This was the period of forced famine in Ukraine while there was plenty of food in Baku: lots of vegetables and fruit. My husband was involved in a very important mission: filling strategic stocks of grain. Vitaliy was a very responsible employee. In 1933 he wrote to me that he got an invitation to the military Academy in Kharkov. This was a good offer and he moved to Kharkov. He became head of the laboratory involved in scientific research of strategic food storage conditions. Vitaliy was also invited to teach politics and some technical subjects at the Military Academy. Kharkov was the capital of Ukraine before 1934. It was a big industrial center. He received a nice two-room apartment in the apartment building for military officials and lecturers of the military Academy. I arrived from Baku with our little daughter.

The most important events for me were letters from my husband and relatives from Baku. Vitaliy was a major in logistics services – he was responsible for soldiers' meals. Although he was not at the frontline he was shell-shocked twice and rescued from a pile that fell on him. He had an injury to his back, but he remained in service. My relatives told me about the events of their life. My mother died in Baku in 1944. Baku was not under German occupation during the Great Patriotic War. My younger brother Boris, his son and my sister Polia's husband Boris perished at the front. Polia couldn't bear that he died."

Stories from Georgia

Bella Chanina

→ entropa.org/en/biography/bella-chanina

Bella Chanina was born in Kishinev in 1923. Following in the footsteps of her father, Bella studied vine growing and wine making at agricultural college in Kishinev. During the War, Bella's family fled to Rostov (today Russia), where she and her father found agricultural work. They returned to Kinishev after the War and Bella resumed her studies. She worked for the Winemaking Industry Department, where she met her future husband, and was later appointed as chief of the Department of Agricultural Statistics. After the Perestroika,²² Bella was involved in the rebirth of Jewish life in Kishinev, helping to start a Jewish library and community centre in the city.

“ My mother Sarah Rosenthal was born in 1887. When she was four, my grandfather died. My grandmother Ester raised her to be a future Jewish wife. My mother learned to cook and sew and knew Jewish traditions well. However, my mother was eager to study. She had a strong character and ran away from Tele- nesti at the age of 16. She went to study in the Jewish grammar school. After finishing it she got a certificate of a teacher. My mother moved to Tiflis, that's what Tbilisi was called at the time, to her brothers Max and Gedaliye. I don't remember under what circumstances they had left there. She worked as a teacher.

When she was in Tbilisi this was the period of geno- cide against the Armenian population in Turkey in 1915–1916. My mother told me that in Tbilisi a commit- tee was organized to provide assistance to Armenians and she worked in this committee. She said when Armenians came to talk to her, they complained, 'You are a Georgian and you provide more help to Geor- gians,' and vice versa, when Georgians talked to her, they said, 'You help Armenians more than Georgians.' They never guessed that she was neither Georgian nor Armenian, but a Jew. My mother helped Georgians and Armenians equally.”



Bella's mother, Sarah Fichgendler, née Rosenthal, in 1922 (Source: Centropa)

22 Perestroika, (Russian: "restructuring") program instituted in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s to restructure Soviet economic and political policy. Seeking to bring the Soviet Union up to economic par with capitalist countries such as Germany, Japan, and the United States,

Rebeka Evgin

→ centropa.org/biography/rebeka-evgin

Rebeka Evgin was born in 1934 in Adana, a Turkish city on the Mediterranean coast. While Rebeka remembers the War as being a time of fear in Turkey, Turkish Jews were spared the horrors of the Second World War. They did, however, face some discriminatory policies at the hands of the State, including the Wealth tax. In 1949, at age 14, Rebeka moved to Istan- bul with her mother and sister. There she mar- ried Moredehay Murat and had two children. She spent her life at home, working and raising her children.

“ In Fiddler on the Roof, the heroes ask each other “Why do Jews wear hats all the time?”, and the answer, just as we all know, is, “Because Jews are always ready to migrate”. As in one of George Moustaki's songs, “Le Juif Errant” (The Wandering Jew) has become the fate of the Jews. And when I think about my ancestors, we see that my roots extend to Urmi. Urmi is a town between Russia and Armenia.

My paternal grandfather Avram Babakardash was born in Urmi around 1870. He lived in Iran, in Van, in Başkale, in Konya, in Halep²³ and in Damascus. I don't have much information about him but I know he was quite religious and that he spoke in Georgian. They dealt with livestock. A lot of his family members died during World War I. My grandfather married Cevahir Babaoglu after losing his first wife.

I have no information about the mother and father of my mother. Her father was called Daniel Nuriyeller, her mother Simbul. My mother's father married twice too. There is no information about his first marriage. Those are war years, unknown ailments²⁴ epidemics would cause deaths at young ages.²⁵ Georgian would be spoken in this family too, and religious rules were deemed very important. My uncle Avram Babaoglu was meeting up with Yakup and Mordo Murat. Yakup was engaged to a Sephardic lady but he had rejected the



Rebeka Evgin and her fiancé in 1950 (Source: Centropa)

engagement thinking that the wishes of this lady were excessive and that he could not live up to these wishes. My brother-in-law Yakup had done his military service in Adana, long before this. My father-in-law and my father were distant relatives. My brother-in-law's family also immigrated from Georgia but the Murat family went to Samsun.

The Sephardic Jews and the Georgian Jews lived to- gether in Adana. My father used to go to the synagogue on Saturday mornings. The synagogue was a rented house that had been converted to a synagogue any- ways. There would be extensive work for the holiday of Passover. Coffee beans would be boiled, dried up and ground in a special way. Rice would be rinsed, dried, and filled in bags. Since there was no matzoh bread would be baked with yeastless flour and salt, and that bread would be eaten throughout those 8 days.²⁶

23 Last three are cities in eastern, central and southeastern Anatolia respectively

24 There were no antibiotics then, high fevers would cause deaths

25 Flu, typhus, cholera epidemics

26 Matzah is unleavened bread eaten by Jews during the holiday of Passover (Pesach) in commemoration of their Exodus from Egypt. The rapid departure from Egypt did not allow for the fermentation of dough, and thus the use of leavening of any kind is proscribed throughout the week-long holiday.

My mother would make orange marmalade at home and it would be offered to guests on silver trays along with water. There was no chocolate or other types of candy then. It was a tradition to offer sweets like this.

During one Passover, one of our Muslim neighbours came to visit us. They did not grasp that they had to use a spoon to eat the jam my mother was offering this way. They started eating it from the bowl. After a few spoonfuls, they apologized saying they couldn't finish the bowl. This practice is quite special.

My uncle would translate the Passover Haggadah into Georgian after reading it, so that the children could understand it. The Haggadah was in Hebrew. My uncle would translate the Haggadah that was in Hebrew instantly, to enable us to understand.²⁷

Adana Jews were not affected much by the policy of "Citizens, speak Turkish". Turkish was always spoken anyways. Even though we spoke in Georgian between ourselves from time to time, we always spoke Turkish on the street.

²⁷ Haggadah, also spelled Haggada, in Judaism, the special book containing the story of the biblical Exodus as it must be retold at the beginning of the seder dinner on Passover (Pesach). The book's commentaries on the story of the Exodus provide a religious philosophy of Jewish history, and the book supplies answers to the traditional questions asked by children at the beginning of the seder.

In this way, two sisters, we became sisters-in-law. According to Georgian traditions, a bride's virginity is important. The mother of the girl waits through the night and without fail sees the bloodied sheets. She takes those sheets home, and offers stuffed grape leaves with yoghurt and sweets made with walnuts to the family. The mother-in-law is called, this is called "yuzgorum-lulugu" (a present given by the bridegroom to his bride when he has unveiled her for the first time and seen her face). Offering stuffed grape leaves with yoghurt means we delivered our daughter pure.

Even though we lived in the same house with my fiancée, and even though we had the civil marriage quite a while before the wedding, my mother waited at the door of the bedroom till the morning. And I gave her the sheets.

She wanted to see it because we lived in the same house. She wanted to prove that even though we were married civilly, my husband and I did not have a sexual relationship before the wedding. My husband was so respectful that I don't remember him holding my hand once while my mother was present."

Georgian recipes

Galya Shihna

- Ingredients:
- 1 kg potatoes
 - 4 onions
 - 1/2 kg blade steak
 - 2 eggs
 - Salt and pepper to taste

Fry the potatoes that have been cut in rounds in oil in a pan. Slice the onions in rounds too, and cook in oil until softened. Salt the meat and cook it separately. Stack one layer potatoes, one layer onions, and cooked meat on top in a pan. Beat two eggs and pour on top. Cook over low heat.

Shillece

It is a Passover meal.

- Ingredients:
- Chicken broth
 - Swiss chard
 - Rice
 - Turmeric
 - Salt and pepper to taste

Bring the chicken broth to boil. Wash the chard and cut into bite size pieces. Add chard and rice to chicken broth. Add salt, pepper and turmeric.

Gozleme

- Ingredients:
- 2 eggs
 - 2 cups flour
 - 2/3 cups milk
 - Slightly fermented grape juice, molasses, honey

Mix the eggs and flour with milk. It becomes a soft dough. Fry in oil in a pan in pancake style rounds. Add fermented grape juice, molasses or honey as desired, to eat.

Borscht

- Ingredients:
- Beef broth or bone marrow broth
 - Cabbage
 - Lentils
 - Garbanzo beans
 - Homemade noodles
 - Salt and pepper to taste

Bring the broth to boil. Soak the garbanzo beans the night before. Wash the cabbage and cut it into bite size pieces. Add to the broth and cook to prepare the soup.

Stuffed Grape Leaves with Yoghurt

- Ingredients:
- 2 cups rice
 - dill weed
 - 2 medium onions
 - mint
 - salt and pepper to taste
 - 250 gr. grape leaves

Boil the grape leaves. Slice the onions thinly and cook in oil, add rice, mint, dill weed, salt and pepper to make the filling. The leaves are filled with this filling and rolled. For two cups of rice, you add 4 cups of water to cook. While serving, you pour yoghurt beaten with a little garlic and sizzling melted butter on the plates.

Zirredosh

- Ingredients:
- 250 gr. walnuts
 - 2 eggs
 - 1 cup sugar
 - A knob of turmeric

Mix all ingredients to make paste. Shape with hands to serve.

Rimma Leibert

→ centropa.org/en/biography/rimma-leibert

Rimma Leibert was born in 1939 in Tbilisi. During the war, Rimma stayed in Tbilisi with her mother, before relocating to Lviv in January 1945. Her father fought on the front and was killed. After struggling to enter Medical and Chemistry college due to antisemitism, Rimma entered the Lviv Technical School of Cinema Logistics and later worked in the Ternopol Department of Cinema logistics until retirement. Rimma did not marry and lived with her brother's family after her mother's death in 1991. She feels that Ukrainian independence has allowed Jewish communities to develop and prosper, and found her own sense of belonging in the Jewish Community of Ternopol.

“ This is my mother Rosa Leibert holding my sister Maya. My mother's friend is standing. This photo was taken in Tbilisi in 1935, my sister Maya is one year old.

My father Boris Leibert finished a political military school and served in Tbilisi, Georgia, where he was chief of the political department of the garrison in Tbilisi. In 1932 he went to a military recreation house in Odessa. He met my mother and proposed to her almost two weeks after they met. My mother returned my father's feelings. They went to grandfather Abram in Kerch where they had a small wedding. They registered their marriage in a registry office in Kerch. My father didn't even want to hear about any Jewish wedding or traditions: he was a convinced communist. After the wedding my father and mother went to Tbilisi where my father was on service.

They lived in a good two-bedroom apartment in the apartment building for officers near the centre of the town. My mother fell in love with Tbilisi, one of the most beautiful towns in the world, a warm hospitable town, with the beautiful thoroughfare of Shota Rustaveli, the Mtazminda Mountain dominating over the city and the narrow streets running down with two-storied houses in them, the laundry lines running across



Rimma Leibert's sister Maya Leibert, mother Rosa Leibert and her friend in 1935 (Source: Centropa)

the streets. It was a multinational city. The population was Georgian, Armenian, Russian, Greek, Turkish and Jewish. There were Christian churches – Georgians are Christian, and Armenian Gregorian churches. There was a Jewish community in the city, but they led a very isolated life. My mother didn't have any Jewish acquaintances in Tbilisi. She socialised with other officers' wives and there were no Jewish women among them. My mother took an active part in public activities and was continuously elected to the women's council²⁸ of the military unit.

In 1934 my sister Maya was born named after the 1 May holiday. She likes recalling her childhood in Tbilisi. She had many friends. My parents' friends often got togeth-

er in our house. They celebrated Soviet holidays – the October Revolution Day,²⁹ 1 May. My sister told me that they sang Soviet songs and danced waltz – the room was big enough for them to dance.

Since my father was a military and a convinced communist he didn't want a mention of Jewish holidays or traditions. He believed them to be the vestige of the past. My mother also adopted communist ideas and had no urge for Jewish traditions.

In 1939 my mother and sister went to Kerch for the summer. My sister often told me how she was struck by the Jewish life and the traditions that my grandfather and his wife led and observed.

There were no bigger Jewish holidays in summer, but she enjoyed Sabbath³⁰, delicious challot³¹ that my grandfather's wife baked, the ceremony of blessing the bread, wine and lighting candles. My mother said that after they returned to Tbilisi my sister cried and asked our father to allow us celebrate Sabbath at home, but he just laughed waving his daughter away.

My mother and I stayed in Tbilisi. My mother went to work at the army headquarters. She didn't know anything about grandfather Abram, his family or her older sister Lusia. There were no letters from them and my mother realised that they either decided to stay in Kerch or failed to evacuate. We lived in Tbilisi during the wartime. My mother received cards – the card sys-

tem was introduced to directly regulate food supplies to the population by food and industrial product rates. During and after the Great Patriotic War there were cards for workers, non-manual employees and dependents in the USSR. The biggest rates were on workers' cards: 400 grams of bread per day, for my father who was at the front for herself and two children. I don't know how she managed to get food for us, but I don't remember being starved. I remember the market in Tbilisi where my mother often took me. I remember Georgian vendor women giving my mother discounts seeing her with two children. They gave me fruit and put more in my pockets. So I remember how kind these people were.

I remember the feeling of shared disaster and sympathy. In 1942 there were air raids in Tbilisi and we had to go to bomb shelters. I even remember a plane with two fuselages flying over our yard. Before running to the bomb shelter my mother used to take the laundry off the line and we were helping her. Often after work my mother went to help in the hospital a half hour drive from our house. My mother spent most time away from home. My sister looked after me and gave me food. Every now and then a neighbour would have come by to see whether everything was all right with us. Sometimes my sister and I took an old tram to go to the hospital. We recited poems and sang songs to patients. The wounded military laughed and looked happy. They gave us chocolate. This chocolate was so very delicious that I still seem to feel the taste of it on my lips.”

29 International Day of Workers' Solidarity, now Labor Day
30 Sabbath, Hebrew Shabbat, day of holiness and rest observed by Jews from sunset on Friday to nightfall of the following day. The time division follows the biblical story of creation: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Genesis 1:5).
31 Challah is a special bread of Ashkenazi Jewish origin, usually braided and typically eaten on ceremonial occasions such as Shabbat and major Jewish holidays (except Passover).

28 Women's councils – departments included in party organs at the direction of the party Central Committee in 1918. Their members were women activists and their tasks included ideological work with women industrial employees and peasants with the aim of their socialist education. Reorganized in 1929

Ferdinand Chernovich

→ centropa.org/en/biography/ferdinand-chernovich

Ferdinand was born in 1923 in Moscow and grew up in a time of unemployment and hardship. His family did not observe Jewish traditions, as Soviet life discouraged religion. In 10th grade (1941), Ferdinand was drafted into the army and trained to be a radio operator. Ferdinand served in the Battle of Stalingrad and received a Military Merit medal at Kursk, eventually losing a leg as the result of injuries sustained on the frontline in Poland. He returned to Moscow in 1945 and studied engineering, but further study was prohibited for Jews. He worked in design until his retirement. He married Mariam in 1958 and they were together until her death in 2001.

“ This is me. The photo was taken when I was getting discharged from the hospital before my departure for Moscow.

In the spring of 1941 I passed my final exams. June 22 the Great Patriotic War began. In August 1941 I and other draftees were sent to the camps in Chelyabinsk.³²

We were sent to the training squadron of the reserve regiment. We stayed there for a month. We were taught how to become radio operators.

In December we were given uniforms and sent to Kazan³³ suburbs in the Guards mortar division. I was a private, and had remained a private until the end of war. We were field telephone operators and laid cable in the fields. We were on round-o'clock duty on the phone. We were supposed to stay by the phone for 24 hours.

If the cable was ruptured somewhere we were supposed to crawl to the place where it was ruptured and joint ruptured ends. Cable was precious to us, we always ran out of it. That is why when the squad moved to another place, we reeled on cable and took it with us.

Our regiment took part in demolishing German forces close to Stalingrad. The city itself was practically devastated by the Germans. We were positioned 13 kilometres from Stalingrad. We had stayed there for 7 months – for the entire period of the Stalingrad campaign. Commanders developed an operational plan and stealthily moved 10 armies there. We began our attack on November

³² Soviet military town about 1500 km to the North-East from Moscow.
³³ Capital of the Autonomous Republic of Tatarstan



Ferdinand Chernovich in 1945 (Source: Centropa)



19, 1942. There were a couple of mortar regiments like ours at the operational disposal of the army.

German forces in the vicinity of Stalingrad were defeated on February 2, 1943. After the Stalingrad battle our regiment as a part of Guards mortar division was sent to Moscow for rearmament and replenishment. Our regiment was replenished and well-armed. We were sent to Kursk. It was withdrawn from division and went to battles as a separate regiment. Our army was getting ready for the Kursk operation.

We arrived there at the end of March, 1943. Mass battles commenced on July 5, 1943. Probably we knew that a fierce battle was ahead of us. During political classes we were told about the coming operation, its tasks. We were apprised of the situation on other front-lines. It was even more fierce than the Stalingrad battle, but it did not last long. I was awarded with the medal for Military Merits after the Kursk battle. I got it in autumn, 1943. It was written in my order citation that I demonstrated discipline and valour.

After Kursk I was not a telephone operator, but a radio operator. Communication with commandment was established. Battery commander had communication with division commander, division commander had communication with the regiment commander and so

on and so forth. I serviced artillery instrumental reconnaissance, which was observing the adversary and regulating fire.

All that data was transferred in cipher via radio operators.³⁴ We did not know the cipher. We moved to the west – to Byelorussia. We liberated the town of Novozybkov in Bryansk district and stopped by Gomel. We fought for positioning. There were no battles. Only in June, 1944 we liberated the entire Byelorussia. We left western Belorussia for Poland.

My front-line experience ended in the Polish town Belastok (also: Białystok). My colleagues, radio-operators and I were on our way to the observation post and I stepped on mine. I was the only one who suffered from a pin-point blast.³⁵ My comrades picked me up. Somebody had the car brought and I was taken to the medical battalion. I was on the operation table in 40 minutes. My leg was amputated. I spent a couple of days in a medical battalion and I was transferred to the army hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia.

It took 13 days to get to Tbilisi from Belastok. I stayed in the hospital for 6 months. I was given a temporary artificial limb and was taught how to walk with an artificial limb. At the end of February 1945 I was discharged from hospital and on March 1, 1945 I came back to Moscow.”

³⁴ Cipher is algorithm for performing encryption or decryption in the military
³⁵ Pinpoint blast is a direct blast

Larisa Shyhman

→ centropa.org/en/biography/larisa-shyhman

Larisa was born in Kyiv in 1925, to a large Jewish family, and has vague memories of the famine of 1932–33. When the War started she was sent to stay with family in Konstantinova, and then moved around to keep safe, ending up in Aktyubinsk (today: Aqtöbe) where she trained as a radio operator. It was a difficult time for her, but eventually serving in Baku she was transferred back to Kyiv. Poor and with an ailing family, Larisa could not return to studying, but met her husband Misha and had two sons. The oldest definitely experienced discrimination in his education, but it did not deter him. Misha was one of the workers sent to help in Chernobyl, exposed to radiation and later he died of melanoma of the skin. Her youngest son emigrated to Israel with his wife, but Larisa remained in Kyiv all her life.

“ This is me, Larisa Shyhman (née Trachtenberg), on vacation with my husband Misha Shyhman. This photo was taken in Sukhumi (Georgia) in 1980.

In 1945 I went to work as a radio operator in Zhuliany airport. Misha was valued in ‘Geophyspribor’, he worked there for a long time.³⁶ He was a training instructor at first, it was something different and I don’t know any details. Then he got a transfer to a design office department. Misha earned well and received significant bonuses for implementation of his inventions.

He was even awarded a silver medal for them. He was a joiner and then electronic equipment specialist. He made tools.

My husband’s colleagues also treated him well and I don’t think he faced any oppression due to his nationality. When he had his both feet on the ground he wanted me to quit my job and stay at home, he said: ‘if you want to go back to work, I will help you with employment’. But his mother told me to keep my job since otherwise I would wear an apron and slippers for the rest of my life. I also wanted to stay at work.

I liked my collective, I enjoyed it there and my colleagues liked and respected me. So after my second son Gennadiy was born on 17 March 1961 I returned to work at the airport. I worked there until retirement.

On 26 April 1986 there was an explosion in Chernobyl. Well, though they didn’t inform people about this explosion, my husband worked with isotopes and had

special devices. At first, it was clear in Kyiv, but then, when I was standing in this line, the radiation moved in our direction. My husband went to Chernobyl soon. They sent people there, but he went on his own will. He said that when this unit exploded older people had to go there. They had lived their life and young people should stay away. He went there on 30 April. I was in Moscow and didn’t know about it. Misha went there with his devices to measure radiation. Miners were following him.

He instructed them where they could walk, where they had to run or step over... Of course, he was exposed to a big dose. And in 1992 he died having melanoma of the skin. Before he died he didn’t function, even his speech organs... So I am alone...

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 my life hardly changed, I was already a pensioner. I read and watch TV. I have many friends and we often get together, sort of a ‘club for those who are over 30’. We laugh a lot, they respect me well. We celebrate Jewish and other holidays. I get along well with them. I don’t care about nationality whatsoever. I have a small pension, but I can manage. I don’t go out much. They come from Hesed to help me around. I am optimistic and how can one be otherwise? Life is short!”



Larisa Shyhman with her husband Misha Shyhman in 1980 (Source: Centropa)

36 State-owned production site for geophysical, mostly electronic, tools.

Daniel Bertram

→ centropa.org/en/biography/daniel-bertram

Daniel Bertram was born in 1920 in Kraków, Poland. When the War broke out, Daniel escaped to Lviv. He was caught by the Russians and sent to several gulags³⁷, before being sent to a camp in Georgia. Daniel was liberated from this camp in September 1941, but stayed in Georgia until the end of the War. He then returned to Kraków, where he discovered that most of his family had been killed in the Holocaust. After an initial period of casual jobs, Daniel worked steadily as a bookkeeper until his retirement in 1985. He married Renata Zisman and continued to observe Jewish holidays and attend Tempel synagogue for all his life.

“ As a Polish deserter and refugee I was arrested by the NKVD³⁸. Two Russian soldiers from the NKVD led us. They had loaded rifles. They took us to the barracks. We were there for three weeks, without baths. We slept on bunks. We didn't know how long we'd be there. And when I was asleep that guy from Sosnowiec³⁹ stole my watch. I got it back, but there's no knowing how many times he stole from me at the house. He could have stolen money from my wallet, because I never kept tabs on it. I was trusting; I never thought that anyone would rob me. And then he said goodbye because he was going with a different group. After three weeks they took us away in this lorry, to the station in Lviv. We didn't know where we were going. They loaded us into cattle cars. There were these bunks with palliasses, and a tiny window with a grille. The heat was terrible, but everyday it got colder, which meant that we were travelling north. They gave us a meal once a day. They gave us this kind of round loaf to share between four. Then some of the others among us, in their underwear, got out at lunchtime and carried a pot with noodles. They were pleased to be out in the fresh air. They called it 'lapsha' over there, noodles.

We travelled for six days and got right out to Rybinsk. There we got out and were given a set of clothes, camp



Daniel Bertram in 1954 (Source: Centropa)

clothes, dark blue, our own belt and a dark blue hat with a peak. They gave us dinner, and then took us to the barber, who shaved our heads. But when I was at the barber, the others went to where General Rapaport was giving a speech. He talked about our obligation to work and about discipline. That was Friday. They loaded us onto a ship. We sailed up the Sheksna. The Sheksna flows into the Volga. There were a few devout Jews among us on the ship. And they wanted a minyan, so they co-opted me.

They weren't at all worried that we were going to a camp; they just prayed. Then they put us off at the camp, which was called Turgenevo.

In Turgenevo there were some who tried to form a minyan.⁴⁰ So they got me into the minyan and gave me

a prayer book, because I didn't have one. They took my prayer book off me in a search; there were ten searches, you see.

They took my prayer book and my tefillin. But they left my tefillin batu, that's this bag for the tefillin, I still have it to this day. And then, it was Yom Kippur⁴¹, this one functional Russian found my tefillin.⁴² And he ripped it out of my hand, took my prayer book off me. We didn't even get a chance to pray on Yom Kippur. 'You're not allowed to pray!' But one old man managed to keep his tallit. So he prayed, put it on his pallet on the top bunk. And my friend, who I was in Georgia with afterwards, and back then in the camps, saved his tefillin, because he hid it under his knee. I was in Turgenevo for a few months. They sent us out there on 20th July 1940.

There was this huge project: there were an awful lot of Russkies⁴³ who were building a hydroelectric power plant. We were reinforcing the sluice gate, all the time, near the Volga. And then one day, one night, 4th September 1941, we found out about the Sikorski amnesty. We didn't know about Majski then.⁴⁴ The next day we were called out to the registration committee in alphabetical order. And they asked me where I wanted to go. Did I want to go to Kokand or to Tashkent in Uzbekistan? I wanted to go to Astrakhan, because there was Russian industry there. But a friend from Krakow told me that the Cracovians were going to Georgia, and that I should go there too.

So I went to Georgia: anywhere to be free, so to speak, and not in a camp. There was no question of the West, only what was then the Soviet Union. And everyone could go where he or she wanted, it only had to be at least 100 kilometers from the border, meaning from the front, and we weren't allowed to go to the central cities.

They didn't want a large influx of people. They suggested Kutaisi, so that was what I chose. So we went to Georgia, arrived in Tbilisi. Before the war it was called Tiflis, and afterwards Tbilisi.

We got there and straight from the station went to the prayer house. It used to be called a prayer house. Synagogues are built differently, you see, and a prayer house is this tiny room, or in somebody's house. There it was a small room.

There were Jews from Kyiv there, who had escaped. And it turned out that when we got there it was Rosh Hashanah.⁴⁵ Morning and evening we had to go to the prayer house. In the evening, when the hakham spoke, I didn't know what he was saying. I thought he was speaking Yiddish and that's why I couldn't understand him. It turned out he was speaking Georgian. He was appealing to all the Georgian Jews to look after all of us that had come out of the camps. And they invited us for dinner and let us sleep that first night. I got this host where I had dinner and I slept one night there.

There in Georgia this Georgian woman asked me: 'Is it true,' - because she had been reading the newspapers - 'is it true that they are killing Jews?' I replied that I didn't know anything. But two people from Lviv came to Georgia. One was called Zelmanowicz and the other Gutman. And they said that there, in the ghettos, there was starvation. I don't know how they got to us. But we went to this one prayer house every Saturday afternoon. And one of these Kyiv Jews gave a 'droshe'. 'Droshe', in Ashkenazi 'drasha', in Sephardi, means 'speech'. And he gave this speech about the Torah⁴⁶ what is said on a given day, what 'parsha' or 'polsyk' (according to Mr. Bertram the word used in prewar Kraków for parashah).⁴⁷ And right at the end he told us about the tragedy, that over on the other side they were killing people by then. He already knew everything; perhaps he had read a Russian newspaper or a Georgian one. Perhaps he had found out from Georgian Jews. But we didn't really believe it; we didn't really take much notice, because we didn't know whom it affected. We just listened. I had a few friends in Georgia. On the whole they were good people, though a bit selfish. I've got a photograph of them. The oldest one, in glasses, with the Lenin beard, was from Podgorze.⁴⁸

37 Soviet Labour Camps for political and criminal prisoners
38 Soviet Secret Service, later KGB and now FSB
39 Industrial city in southern Poland
40 Minyan is the minimum of ten men to be capable to hold a prayer according to the Jewish faith

41 Yom Kippur, Hebrew Yom Ha-Kippurim, English Day of Atonement, most solemn of Jewish religious holidays, observed on the 10th day of the lunar month of Tishri (in the course of September and October), when Jews seek to expiate their sins and achieve reconciliation with God.
42 Orthodox Jews wear tefillin to every morning prayer. These are leather prayer straps. Small, angular capsules are attached to them. In them are pieces of parchment with Bible texts. One capsule is worn on the forehead. The other is wrapped around the left arm with a leather strap so that it lies exactly in front of the heart.
43 Russkies derogatory term for Russians
44 The Sikorski-Majski agreement was a treaty between the Soviet Union and Poland that was signed in London on 30 July 1941 Its name is taken from its two most notable signatories: the prime minister of Poland, Władysław Sikorski, and the Soviet ambassador to the United Kingdom, Ivan Maiski.
45 Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, usually in September or October
46 Torah is the Jewish prayer book, which contains the 5 Books of Moses
47 Parashah is the weekly part of the reading of the Torah
48 Podgorze was a town near Kraków, now a district of Kraków

He was an artistic signwriter, could turn his hand to anything and did very well for himself. He promised me that I would be his partner. That was Abraham Lamesdorf. His wife had stayed behind; she died with their son, probably in Belzec.⁴⁹ My other friend was called Dawid Kos Klajman. He had two names, I don't know why; I think he was some kind of salesman. He said he came from Brygl. Brygl, I think in Polish that must have been Brzesko. He never said it in Polish, all he said was Brygl. He had a secret from us: he had a lady friend, who fed him, and he was at her place all day long, after work, of course.

We didn't keep tabs on whether he went to the synagogue on Saturday or not. But it was a small town; it was uncomfortable in that little town to be seeing a non-Jew. Especially because on Saturdays and holidays I went with the friend I talked about to the synagogue. There was no one else from among our people at the synagogue, only the two of us.

We went regularly, but we didn't have access to the 'liye'.⁵⁰ We didn't have any money, and you had to pay an awful lot. And the hakham called people up. It went to the highest bidder. 'Assima naty, to ... orrasi manaty, sammassi manaty ... tiskula mitzvah'. That was what he said, in Georgian and Hebrew. 'Tiskula mitzvah' means 'you will be doing a good deed', or 'commandment'. And what I said at the beginning, that was the bidding. 100 rubles, 200 rubles, 300 rubles.' We couldn't afford such luxuries.

We sat at the side, and over there they were bidding for the reading. That's the way it is all over the world, except in Poland. Others of our people didn't go to the synagogue because they were busy with work. And one of them criticized me terribly when I asked him if he'd been to the synagogue, because I was surprised that he hadn't been. Well, he offended me terribly.

He found out that I'd been to the synagogue, and told me that I was 'as stupid as a shoe off the left foot'. But the older one in glasses said to me: 'Don't worry, Bertram, the Lord won't forsake you.' This barrister, Goldberg, was in the apartment too, and he added: 'If the

Lord God doesn't forsake you, then people will!' And I can't forget that. Very few people went to the synagogue there. Synagogue was luxury. They were busy working, to earn money to buy bread. But because we went to the synagogue, we had these hosts. And they would invite us to their homes every Saturday and every holiday. And we would eat Georgian kosher⁵¹ food; we waited for that meat all week, of course, because other than that, privately, I didn't eat it. For lunch we had gruel, flaked corn. And that was our lunch. I don't think I ate anything else. We didn't get a second course there. And as for breakfast, they did very well for themselves, only I was the worst off. I'm talking about our private lives now, not about the factory.

There was a time, you see, when I didn't even have enough money for breakfast. I went through a whole month like that, and they persuaded me to sell my Tissot⁵² that I'd been given by my father when I graduated from school. Well, I sold it. I wanted 5,000 rubles, but I only got 3,400 or 3,500. And then I had to give my two housemates some money to buy oil, for arranging the sale.

I was working in a clothing factory. 'Shveytnaya fabrika', or 'The Kyiv Clothing Factory'. The director was called Macharadze, and the other one Karikashvili. A year I worked there; then I got seconded to the Labour Battalion.⁵³ I was in that Labour Battalion for six weeks; those were the harshest conditions. No prison on earth has conditions like that. Six weeks I slept on the bare ground; it wasn't a hut, just a tent with no roof. No roof, just branches. So I spent six weeks in my clothes, six weeks on the ground, six weeks without a bath, and on top of that: lice. I didn't know how long I'd stick it there, because the work was hard and they gave us very little to eat. I got weak, could hardly walk; like an old man. I stayed in Georgia from the time they liberated us from the camp on 4th September 1941 almost until the end of the war.

The war ended on 9th May 1945, and I left Georgia on 22nd April 1945. I left, but at that time we still weren't allowed to leave! My neighbours left earlier than that;

they kept it a secret from me, but they came back. They were turned back by this NKVD functionary, because he asked them, on a train during an inspection: 'Where are you going?'; and they said: 'To Poland.' 'Go back, there is no Poland!' They came back, and then my neighbour got himself and me passes from the militia, to travel on family affairs, but not to Poland! We only got two rail tickets: on one we were to travel to Slavuta (Ukraine), and in Slavuta we were to throw that ticket away and go to Kamenets Podolski. We were travelling for three weeks, changing trains every other day, because there was no other way. It was very hard to get on a train, and the conductor was on the running board, and people were everywhere. How were we supposed to get on, with a rucksack, and him with a briefcase?

Well, that neighbour of mine was cunning, the one in glasses, with a beard. 'Comrade, sir!' – he said and winked conspiratorially.

So the conductor got all excited that he was going to get some money. And when he'd let us into the wagon, he didn't give him any. And he would do the same thing with every conductor. In Tbilisi my wallet was stolen. I had 90 rubles in it, my school ID, my secondment papers from the camp, and three or four letters or so from my parents, postcards. And at the militia station where I reported the theft, they put my witness and me in a cell: all night, with young Georgian criminals.

And in the end the duty officer opened up and the chiefs came with a list and let us all out. They'd let my witness out earlier, at 8 o'clock in the morning. But I'd been kept in until noon.

Once I was free I picked my things up from the deposit. They indicated to me that I should travel without a ticket if I didn't have any money. Outside the guy with the beard, Lamesdorf, and my other future partner were waiting for me. And we went on.

This is the only photo I have brought from Georgia. It's a picture of me (first from the left in the top row), Abraham Lamesdorf, Dawid Kos Klajman and a man whose name I don't remember. The photo was taken on 30th August 1942 in Kutaisi. I had a few friends in Georgia. On the whole they were good people, though a bit selfish. The oldest one, in glasses, with the Lenin beard, was from Podgorze. He was an artistic signwriter, could

turn his hand to anything and did very well for himself. He promised me that I would be his partner. That was Abraham Lamesdorf. His wife had stayed behind; she died with their son, probably in Belzec. My other friend was called Dawid Kos Klajman. He had two names, I don't know why; I think he was some kind of salesman. He said he came from Brygl. Brygl, I think in Polish that must have been Brzesko. He never said it in Polish, all he said was Brygl. He had a secret from us: he had a lady friend, who fed him, and he was at her place all day long, after work, of course. We didn't keep tabs on whether he went to the synagogue on Saturday or not. But it was a small town; it was uncomfortable in that little town to be seeing a non-Jew. Especially because on Saturdays and holidays I went with the friend I talked about to the synagogue."



Daniel Bertram, Abraham Lamesdorf, Dawid Kos Klajman and unknown man (Source: Centropa)

49 German extermination camp in Poland, where Jews were murdered with the help of Diesel Gas and later Zyklon B rat poison.
50 The word used in prewar Kraków for 'aliyah' – going up the bimah to read the Torah
51 Food that is allowed to eat for Jewish people, simply: no porque, no shellfish and separation between milk and meaty products.
52 Tissot is a watch brand
53 A group of the prisoners from the Labour Camp, who worked in much harder conditions

Meyer Tulchinsky

→ centropa.org/biography/meyer-tulchinskiy

Meyer was born in Kyiv in 1924, to parents who spoke Yiddish, but didn't observe Jewish traditions. Meyer remembers the famine of 1933, and the queues for bread, but it wasn't as bad for them in Kyiv as in the countryside. Initially unaware of any antisemitic discrimination, things changed in 1939, with Jewish schools closing. When the war broke out, the family evacuated to Uzbekistan, where people were starving, and then to Tbilisi where he was recruited for the Army and sent to the front. Wounded in Hungary in 1945, he was discharged and went back to Kyiv, where he enrolled in college. He married his wife, a nurse, in 1966, and had a daughter.

“ My aunt Rosa met and married in Kyiv Lavrentiy Kartvelishvili, a Georgian and a Soviet party and government official. He worked in Kyiv for many years. During his studies at the Commercial Institute from 1910–1916 he was involved in underground party activities.

In 1917 he became a member of the Kyiv Committee of the Bolshevik Party, and in 1918, one of the leaders of the underground Bolshevik organisation, a member of the all-Ukrainian Provisional Committee. From 1921–1924 he was First Secretary of the Kyiv Province Committee of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party.

Institute in Moscow. He lives in Tbilisi now. He graduated as a Doctor of Technical Sciences and became a professor. He was a lecturer at the Polytechnic Institute in Tbilisi. Now he's retired. He married Dodoli, a Georgian woman. She had a difficult life. In the 1930s her father was Deputy Minister of Education in Georgia. He was arrested in 1938. He was suspected of being involved in anti-revolutionary activities. Her mother had died some time before, so Dodoli lost her parents when she was 14 years old. After her father was arrested policemen took her out of the apartment, locked the door and said, 'And you, girl, go away!' Dodoli had to seek shelter at her distant relatives'. They were very concerned about having to give shelter to the daughter of an 'enemy of the people'. Dodoli had a strong will, which helped her to fight all hardships. She finished secondary school in Tbilisi and entered the Vocal Department at the Conservatory in Tbilisi. Later she became a teacher at this Conservatory. She fiercely hated the Soviet regime. When her father was rehabilitated posthumously in the 1950s, she made every effort to have all their property, which had been confiscated in 1938, returned.⁵⁴

54 Arrests and executions were under Stalin during the Great Terror and before 1932–1939, 1953–1956 De-Stalinization and rehabilitation of political prisoners.

My mother's sister Fania moved to Tbilisi from Tarashcha 5–6 years after the October Revolution and stayed there. I don't know what brought her to Tbilisi. She married a Polish man named Kalnitskiy. He was an irrigation engineer. Fania was arrested in 1937 and sentenced to five years of imprisonment for her contacts with an 'enemy of the people', Rosa's husband, who often visited his relatives in Tbilisi. Besides, she was accused of not returning books by forbidden Soviet writers to the library. She had the right to write to her relatives and inform them what she was in charge of. Fania was in a camp in the Perm region until 1939.

Rosa, who was studying at the Industrial Academy went to the authorities and said, 'Why did you arrest her? In that case you should arrest me for my contacts with an 'enemy of the people', too'.

However strange it may sound, they released and rehabilitated Fania and even suggested that she entered the Communist Party, but Fania refused. Some time later she was appointed director of a Russian school in Tbilisi.

After I returned to Tbilisi from the front, Fania and I visited her former students in Tbilisi, and I witnessed the respect they treated her with. She died in 1966.

She had two children. Her son, Alexei, became a Candidate of Technical Sciences. He settled down in Moscow when he was an adult. Her daughter, Medeya, married a Georgian man and divorced him later. She lives in Tbilisi now.

Riva lived in a small room near the Franko Theatre

and was very poor. She lived in Kyiv for over 20 years. I remember that she didn't have any clothes to have her picture for the passport taken, so she borrowed a blouse from the dressing room in the theatre. Riva was a straightforward and honest woman. She lived with a Ukrainian man; they didn't register their marriage. They didn't have any children. During the war she was in evacuation in Tbilisi. She kept changing jobs there, too. During the war she worked as a tutor at a labour penitentiary institution near Tbilisi. After the war she was a receptionist in the governmental room of the railway station in Tbilisi. This was a privileged position: only deputies and high officials were allowed into this room. Riva visited Kyiv several times. During one of her visits I went to the theatre with her, and I was struck by the praises Riva got from the leading actors. They admired her trade union leadership activities. Riva was a very pure and transparent person. She died in Tbilisi in 1974.

Riva, who was living in Tbilisi, came to our rescue again. There was a labour camp for children somewhere in the Caucasus and a factory in it, and Riva was employed as a tutor there. She managed to send us the necessary forms to come and work at this camp for youngsters. We travelled to the Caucasus from Middle Asia across the Caspian Sea. My father had a weak heart after working in the cotton fields. He died on the way at Ushakovskoye station in Middle Asia. He was buried quietly there. We reached Tbilisi, and I entered the Communications College where I studied for several months. I lived in the hostel, and my mother rented a room. In 1942 the Germans came close to Zakavkazy and total mobilisation was announced in Tbilisi. 300,000 recruits went to the front, and I was among them. Every third one of them perished.



Meyer Tulchinskiy in 1945 (Source: Centropa)

My mother got a job as a medical nurse at the navy hospital in Tbilisi. The Georgians treated my mother very well. As soon as I went to the front she was registered at the military office as a member of the family of a front line soldier, and she moved to an apartment where she lived until the end of the war. This hospital gave treatment to wounded soldiers of the southern front. I was at the 3rd Ukrainian front. My mother was always looking for me among the wounded soldiers who were being brought to the hospital. I wrote to her but now I think I could have written more letters to her.

We went to Tbilisi, but I didn't feel at home there. We decided to go to Kiev. We weren't awaited by anyone. Our place had been destroyed, and we didn't have a place to live. It was a good thing that I kept my passport during my mobilisation to the army. It was a hectic moment at the military office.

Imprint

Publisher:

Centropa – Zentrum für jüdische Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts e.V.
c/o WeWork
Axel-Springer-Platz 3
20355 Hamburg / Germany

Represented by:

Maximilian von Schoeler, Board member

Registration:

Registered in the German Register of Associations
Registration number: VR 23236
Competent jurisdiction: Hamburg District Court

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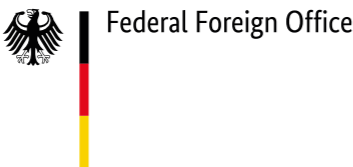
Design:

Alexander von Freeden – LaikaLaika.de

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Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh in the role of the groom in the silent film 'In the Name of God', Baku 1926 Source: Centropa)