Colonists.

INSTEAD OF A FOREWORD

Part One

“Despise no one and consider nothing superfluous, for there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is nothing that does not have its place…”

(“Pirkei Avot – the Teaching of the Fathers”, p. 159)

…A boundless steppe of feather grass, overgrown with weeds and thick bushes as far as the horizon, appeared before the eyes of the Jewish colonists who arrived on this wild land, which was no promised land.

In 1824–25 settlers from the Baltic region arrived in these wild steppes north of the Black Sea. They had to settle here. Now this was their place of residence; here they were destined to live.

It turned out that German farmers, “Bauern”, brought from Germany, had already settled nearby. They had been given decent conditions for resettlement: building materials and farm tools such as ploughs, seed drills and so on.

Imagine the horror of the settlers: no river, no forest… All around a gloomy steppe called the Wild Field. They began to build dugouts and dig wells. Representatives of the district authorities and land surveyors arrived. The land had to be divided into allotments for each head of family, and after the division a lottery was held to decide where each family’s strip of 28 desyatinas would fall.

So next to each Jewish colony there was a German settlement. One must give them their due: they taught the Jews to make “saman” bricks and to build dugouts (double walls of blackthorn twigs, with the gap filled with clay mixed with dry grass). These were called “valkovye” walls; they went up very quickly and gave at least some kind of dwelling. Fortunately there was plenty of clay in these parts, and the twigs were cut in the gullies. In short, by the beginning of winter everyone had built themselves “dwellings”, put in stoves, and heated them with deadwood, tumbleweed and the like.

They survived! The colony had to move 2.5–3 km to the south, where the place of residence was fixed: the water was closer, at 4–5 metres, and it was not so bitter.

In all, the “plan” was for a colony of four rows, two streets with two rows each; they have survived to this day. Later we will list the streets and the residents who lived in the colony before the war.

…The settlers understood that in this new life one had to be prudent. One should not paint everything in rosy colours, or, to put it simply, one should not deceive

oneself; it is just as harmful to fall into the other extreme and see everything in black.

It turned out that the Jewish settlers were subject to two failings: excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. The settlers had an optimistic, religious philosophy: they fervently believed in truth, justice and honesty; but when it came to their own situation and the life of their families, they fell into an almost hopeless pessimism: “bad, bad, shlekht”. Needless to say, the Jewish settlers received the full measure of hardship, grief and misfortune; they stopped believing in promises and oaths about a “heavenly” life on this land. They understood well that all that came from the evil one. Only by themselves, working with their own hands, could they live on this fertile land and raise decent harvests. By the way, the “Joint” responded to their troubles: it sent its representative to the district, and he began to distribute seed and some tools among the colonies, and sometimes helped with money.

By the 30s of the 18th century the settlement of the south-eastern part of the Wild Field was complete. The resettlement of the so-called Polish Jews to the areas of the Ingulets river began. The colonies were located in what are now the Kherson, eastern Sumy and Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk) oblasts. These colonies bordered on already existing Ukrainian villages.

These settlers too had their share of grief, although living conditions there were much better: a river nearby, and a forest. For the Jewish settlers this meant a great deal.

So in the first quarter of the 18th century the comprehensive settlement of the Wild Field began. In all, land was “allotted” for 35 settlements or colonies: 17 Jewish and 18 German. The settlers named their colony after the place in the Baltic region from which they had been moved. So our ancestors’ colony came to be called “Vilner”, because they had been moved from Vilna (Lithuania).

Who were our distant ancestors? By origin they were Ashkenazi Jews, simple craftsmen and small traders. It is hard now to imagine their state when they were torn from the places where their ancestors had lived for centuries and thrown into the abyss of the unknown.

One may reckon: the Jews were expelled from Spain by King Ferdinand, and especially by his wife Isabella, who insisted on the expulsion; this was in 1496. We believe that besides North Africa the Jews rushed west, to the Swabians, and later made their way to Poland and the Baltic region, to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It was then that the YIDDISH language was born. This language absorbed 60–70% German words; the rest is Hebrew and the local dialect. Later we will tell in detail about the origin of the language of the Eastern Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish.

But we have strayed from the story of the Wild Field.

...The territories of the Wild Field stretched from the Dnieper to the present Voronezh oblast, and these lands were then called the Wild Field. The lands of the Great or Golden Horde bordered on the lands of Rus.

It was dangerous to live here because of warlike neighbours: the Crimean Tatars, the Nogais, the Khazars and other tribes. These hordes often raided the neighbouring Russian lands.

The first large attack by the Crimean Tatars took place in 1507. From then on destructive, plundering raids became constant. They plundered and burned villages, killed men, women and children or took them captive, kept slaves themselves or sold them in the slave markets of the Middle East and North Africa.

Part of the lands of the Wild Field lay on the left bank of the Don, which was on the route of the Crimean Tatars' invasions of Russian lands. Because of the frequent raids of Tatars and Nogais on Russian lands, the question of guarding the southern borders became acute for the Russian state.

Let us note that 1571 is considered the time when these lands became part of the Russian state. How was the guarding of the southern borders organised?

According to the regulations, at the "hour H" mounted detachments rode out along set routes to guard the borders. In summer, when Tatar raids were more frequent, watch posts were organised. Thus one post was set up not far from the edge of the border at Bolshoi Zaton (near present-day Liski). It was considered the most battle-ready, mobile and numerous.

And yet the measures taken were not enough to defend the border. So fortress towns were soon built, with far and near watch posts beside them, but building fortresses could not fully protect the border from Tatar raids.

In 1775 His Serene Highness Prince Grigory Potemkin, the empress's favourite, began to build the Belgorod defensive line. Its total length was 798 km, and it stretched from the town of Akhtyrka in Sumy oblast of Ukraine to the town of Kozlov in Tambov oblast.

In the first half of the 18th century the whole of Right-Bank Ukraine was under the heel of the Polish szlachta. The Potocki, Wiśniowiecki, Koniecpolski lords and others were absolute masters of thousands of slaves; they boasted of the wealth gained by their slaves' labour, and were free to pardon or execute their slaves. What went on in the lords' estates concerned no one. Every nobleman was a petty king in his own domain.

The lords and the Uniate church behaved brutally; unable to bear the forced labour and abuse, the serfs, the slaves, fled. The place chosen was ideal: beyond the Dnieper rapids, on the island of Khortitsa. Runaway serfs and vagrants from Ukraine and Russia gathered there. They began to call themselves Cossacks, and later Zaporozhian Cossacks.

This free community, the Zaporozhian Cossacks, organised the guarding of their lands well. The guard began from the so-called Palanka: from present-day Mariupol to the Zaporozhian rapids, many kilometres from the Russian guarded line.

Along the whole length from the Palanka to the rapids, watch towers were built within sight of each other. If a Tatar raid was spotted, the Cossack on duty set fire to dry grass on the tower.

So within a couple of hours people beyond the rapids learned of the raid, and urgent measures were taken to repel it and defend their lands.

Knowing about the endless Tatar raids, Russians were afraid to settle far from the defensive line. The rapid settlement of the Wild Field began on the territory of Ukraine. This happened after the manifesto of Catherine II on the annexation of Crimea to the Russian crown.

The empress faced the question of whether to keep the Zaporozhian Sich. This military formation, called the Zaporozhian Cossacks, was by its structure a free community that obeyed no one. Since Crimea had been joined to Russia, the warlike Sich was no longer needed.

In 1775, after the suppression of Emelyan Pugachev's revolt, the empress charged His Highness Count Grigory Potemkin, etc., etc., with liquidating the Zaporozhian Sich and subordinating the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Russia. By decisive action he liquidated the Sich and founded a Zaporozhian Cossack host subject to the Russian crown.

Potemkin took an active part in resettling the Zaporozhian Cossacks to the Terek and the Kuban, where the Terek and Kuban Cossack hosts were created as a counterweight to the warlike peoples of the Caucasus.

Rich and noble Cossacks turned to their worst enemy, the Turkish sultan, and he allowed them to settle at the mouth of the Danube. The village of Vylkovo, a legacy of the Zaporozhian Sich, has survived to our days.

A large number of Cossacks, the poor ones, rushed into the Wild Field of Ukraine. Many old Ukrainian villages in south-eastern Ukraine have survived to our days. At about the same time, under G. Potemkin, the city of Kherson with a shipyard was founded at the mouth of the Dnieper.

And yet the Wild Field continued to be settled spontaneously. People were drawn to where there were no landlords, no serf labour, no slaves; besides, the land turned out to be fertile, and a metre-thick layer of black earth has survived to our days. But there were drawbacks: no water, no rivers, no forests. But people get used to and adapt to wild nature: they learned to get water from wells, and made dams in the gullies, collecting rain and spring meltwater.

And they survived! The Wild Field began to flourish: instead of damp dugouts they began to build solid houses of saman brick, warm in winter and cool in summer; they learned to make red roof tiles, began to acquire draught animals; trade got going, selectively for now; representatives of trading firms appeared, and even the American firm “Singer” reached the Wild Field.

It is considered that by 1850–55 the colonists had become prosperous farmers. Most lived in solid houses, and horses and oxen appeared in the yards. Most worked the land on their own and, with the help of the German farmers, learned to work the land like real farmers!

HISTORICAL NOTE.

We will begin with the historical time when Russia set about developing the Black Sea region.

...After the end of the war and the defeat of Pugachev, Grigory Potemkin, the favourite of Empress Catherine II, took up directly the development of New Russia, which is the eastern region of the Wild Field.

Under his leadership a fleet was built on the Black Sea, and very hastily: His Serene Highness knew how to hurry people. He took part in the war with Turkey and promoted an experienced, talented naval commander, F. F. Ushakov, to command the fleet.

Potemkin’s colonising activity was much criticised. Nevertheless, impartial witnesses such as General Kirill Razumovsky, who visited the conquered lands in 1782, could not fail to be surprised by the development and strengthening of the south of Russia. In 1783 the Turks were driven out of Crimea, and on his initiative the Crimean peninsula was joined to Russia that same year.

Thus Grigory Potemkin thoroughly took up the development of the northern Black Sea region. Under his leadership, in 1778, as we already know, Kherson, Nikolaev and Sevastopol were founded, and the fortress of Odessa was conquered.

The war with Turkey of 1787 was considered successful: Kinburn was taken, Ochakov was besieged and later taken. That was when the great Russian commander A. Suvorov rose to prominence. In 1790 Bendery was taken and the Turkish stronghold, the fortress of Izmail, was stormed; afterwards Larga, Kagul and Focşani were taken.

So the northern part of the Black Sea region began to be rapidly settled. We have mentioned Kherson and Nikolaev; then came the turn of Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), and naturally they began to develop the liberated Crimea. The cities of Sevastopol and Simferopol were founded.

On 2 April 1782 the empress signed the Manifesto that finally secured Crimea for Russia. Potemkin’s first step in carrying out this Manifesto was the rapid

construction of the sea port of Sevastopol. For outstanding services to the fatherland Potemkin was appointed governor of New Russia. Crimea became a desired acquisition for Empress Catherine II. The Crimean khan Islam-Girey recognised Russia. Then the question arose: what to do with the Zaporozhian free community, which did not recognise Russia? And His Serene Highness Potemkin, etc., skilfully dealt with this delicate question, the liquidation of the Zaporozhian Sich.

...Who was His Serene Highness, count, prince, governor, favourite Grigory Potemkin? A highly educated man, a polyglot, he knew French, German, Polish, Latin, Ancient Greek, Old Church Slavonic and others. He was a deeply religious man but tolerant of other religions; he honoured his own and did not persecute others. Potemkin loved music; by the way, there were many Jewish musicians in his orchestra...

...In 1787 Potemkin directed the preparations for Empress Catherine II's journey to Crimea. He showed Catherine only real, existing villages. By the way, Ekaterinoslav was created by the empress's order at the confluence of the Dnieper and the Samara.

During this historic journey of the empress, Potemkin reported that east of the New Russian possessions, almost to the Volga, there stretched huge unpopulated territories called the Wild Field.

One way or another, the empress decided to settle the empty lands with Jews from the Baltic region. It is known that across Russia Jews had no right to farm or own land. At the same time she decided to invite peasant farmers from her homeland, Germany, and, so that evil tongues accused her of bias, the Germans would teach the Jews to work the land.

So a plan appeared to settle the empty lands of the Wild Field. Catherine conceived it but did not manage to carry it out. The plan was put into practice by her grandson Nicholas I.

....The Jews were torn from places they had lived in for centuries; they had never worked the land; this was the poorest part of the Jewish community of the Baltic region. They were engaged in crafts and small trade. There was weeping throughout the Baltic region. Go? Where? It was said that they would be taken to a wild, unpopulated land, where terrible winds blow, where the winters are cold, where there is nothing: no housing, no forest, no rivers.

The settlers were given a small state loan and promised that there, in the steppe, each family would be granted a plot of land and that the state would bear the cost of moving to the new place. There was no point in refusing: everyone had been registered, the Jewish street in the city of Vilna was guarded, and in fact there was nowhere to run.

Our ancestors submitted to fate and in early spring 1824 set off for distant lands, to the very centre of the Wild Field. They moved strictly south-east, and after several months the settlers were assigned their new place of residence.

The Wild Field stretched to the very horizon. Here they were destined to live and raise their children; here was their new Homeland!

...At last the hard, exhausting journey was over. They arrived at the new place at the beginning of summer of the same year. Land surveyors came and began to "lay out" the colony into streets and private "plans", one desyatina per household. The settlers carried their belongings to their "plan", that is, to the plot where they had to build a dwelling and clear ground for a vegetable garden; in a word, our ancestors began to make a home in this wild steppe. By the tsar's decree each family, that is, each head of family, was allotted 28 desyatinas of land. Since our ancestors had lived in the city of Vilna, they began to call their new place of residence VILNER, and this name has stuck to our days. But an official name was given: the colony of Nadezhnoye, Mariupol district, Ekaterinoslav province.

It is hard for us to imagine the horror of the settlers, but they had to live, to survive in this boundless empty land.

What was the Wild Field at that time? A huge expanse of unploughed land from the roaring Dnieper to the Quiet Don. Age-old virgin soil overgrown with wild grasses and bushes, over which half-wild hordes of Khazars, Tatars, Mongols, Nogais and others roamed.

It was frightening to live in those parts at that time; the state had not yet arranged the guarding of these lands. There were no landlords or serfs here. People were afraid to settle close to Crimea, where the Tatars led a parasitic way of life.

If we turn to the Ukrainian history of the Wild Field, it turns out that communities of Goths lived next to the Field. The Goths accepted Christianity in the 4th century, and the Bible was translated into Gothic.

In Kievan Rus the Old Testament appeared only in the 15th century; it was translated into Old Church Slavonic by wise Greeks, who themselves had borrowed the Bible from the Jews of the Holy Land in the reign of Alexander of Macedon, but that is a separate story.

Information about the Gothic community was suppressed until our time. The Goths, who came from the territory of present-day Sweden, are not kin to the Swabians. Despite this, it became known from German ideology that descendants of the Goths survived in Crimea. They considered that the Tats and the Krymchaks were the descendants of the ancient Goths, so Hitler did not exterminate them; he did not consider them Jews. After the final victory over the Soviets the Germans planned to drive the Romanians out of conquered Crimea and rename Simferopol Gotenburg and Sevastopol Theoderichshafen.

Why has this historical information been consigned to oblivion? Because instead of historical facts we have “a whole set of stories and legends about the Wild Field, fantasies that do not fit into the decrepit histories adjusted to ideological concepts”.

However, the Wild Field, its existence and settlement, is a historical fact; that eastern Ukraine bordered on the Field is also a fact.

So, whether we like it or not, history is ceasing to be the monopoly of the state and its scientific institutions. Every free, educated person has the right to his own historical version of his ancestors’ past.

However, “competent specialists” may begin to take part in the fascinating process of throwing light on the historical facts of the conquest and settlement of the Wild Field.

Dear writers! Think less about scholarly works and dissertations and more about historical truth and the reader’s pleasure.

“The Wild Field exists, it is real, but invisible to physical eyes, like magnetic and electric fields. It is everywhere, but only poets hear it, and those who, like poets, can hear the inaudible. Those who have ears, living in the south-east, cannot meet. In the Field, another reality, pure and wild, unfathomably far from the comforts of civilisation and the ailments of culture. You who enter the spiritual space of the Wild Field! Who are you? Where from? Where are you going? What are your strengths and what is your right?” (Donetsk Project)

My forefathers, my holy fathers!

My holy forefathers, who have departed, / We strictly follow your commandments. / The holy Sefer Torah always protected us, / We remember your holy chants and melodies.

My holy fathers, bearded, with your peyes, / You always attended the holy synagogues. / Troubles and misfortunes never passed you by, / And you asked the angels to guard your thresholds.

I see you on my way, / I constantly hear Hasidic chants, / Blessed be your memory, my forefathers! / You were always valiant and brave!

For all misfortunes you have gone to Gan Eden, / Your prayers always reached the Most High. / We guard your graves as a holy thing, / Your misfortunes and years are bound with a steel chain. (Free translation from Yiddish)

MY GENEALOGY.

“-Hear our voice and have mercy on us, and do not leave us in the hands of our enemies, so that You are not erased from the memory of us, remember Your oath given to our Fathers...” (“Treasures of Hasidism”, p. 21)

The great-great-grandfather of our family, Ele-Khaim Ignatovich, and great-great-grandmother Sore-Rokhl of the Shmulevich family are the founders of our family. The surname Ignatovich, according to tradition, comes from the name of a Jewish shtetl on the border of Lithuania and Belarus. The Ignatovich family, among others, was to be resettled to the expanses of the Wild Field. There is no particular information about the life of our forefathers, but it is known that they had four sons and two daughters. And when the authorities began to register and draw up lists to determine the heads of families, men who had come of age, there began something that only Jewish heads could have thought up.

The land allotments, 28 desyatinas each, were “cut” per head of family, and... our ancient surname Ignatovich fell apart. The great-great-grandfather’s sons “took” new surnames for themselves, and it turned out that in the Ignatovich family there lived four more families, each with a new surname:

1. Itovich; 2. Khatavich (later they became Khataevich); 3. Kantorovich; 4. Tsygutkin.

This surname was “received” by my great-grandfather Mendl, and so began our family line, the line of the Tsygutkins.

...Our ancestors, like all the settlers, went through all “seven circles of hell”, but according to tradition this was a close-knit, hard-working, enterprising family. They managed to hold on in the first years of life in the Wild Field. They managed to survive and keep their families; all stayed alive.

According to tradition, our great-great-grandfather was a tough, fair and hard-working man and passed these qualities on to his heirs. Evidently our great-grandfather Mendl Tsygutkin had these qualities. He was brought to the new lands at 14–15, presumably born in 1810–11, and as an adult he received an allotment. This allotment passed by inheritance to his eldest son, my grandfather Girshe, and after the emigration of his eldest son Dovid-Meyer to Argentina in 1912 the allotment passed by inheritance to my father Efraim Tsygutkin.

...As was the custom in Jewish families, besides working the land everyone had to acquire a trade. So my grandfather made hats, caps and papakhas for the goyim; in Yiddish this trade was called “kirzhner”.

Mendl Tsygutkin was in the first call-up into the tsarist army among the Jewish settlers. He served in Crimea and there found his intended, my grandmother Sheine-Feige. So it can be said with confidence that grandfather was born in 1853–54. My grandfather had six children:

Dovid-Meyer, born about 1889; a daughter Dvoira, born 1887; my father, born 1885; my uncle Isaak, 1883; a daughter Liya-Liza, born 1881; and the “mizinka”, the nicest, prettiest, most charming, my aunt Genya, born in 1889.

...Of this large family I vaguely remember grandmother Sheine-Feige. I was 4–5 when she came to our colony. She was old, stroked my head, was always neatly dressed and never took the black silk scarf off her head.

I remember aunt Dvoira-Vera well; she and her husband Israel Sher often visited us in summer. They were the kindest couple; they had no children.

And of course uncle Isaak Tsygutkin and aunt Anya; about all of them in detail below.

I saw aunt Liza once, in 1929 or 1930. She came on a visit and took my elder sister Genya away with her.

I first saw aunt Genya during the evacuation. We had made our way under our own steam to the town of Enakievo; her husband was “on the trenches”; she refused to go with us and decided to wait for her husband.

My mother Ester’s relatives. She herself was the eldest in the Levin family, of grandfather Zuse and grandmother Rokhe-Lee. Besides my mother, born 1887, there was a brother Ele, born 1889, who fought in the First World War and was a prisoner in Austria for several years; aunt Bela Naftulkina, born 1892; a daughter Sonya, born 1895; a son Avrom, born 1901; uncle Ruvim, born 1903; and my mother’s youngest brother Genakh, born 1905. This is the Levin line; they too were settlers, like the Tsygutkin line; they too were called “Litvaks”, and our Yiddish speech was very close to the literary language.

So, dear readers, I have listed all the members of our families; I vouch for the accuracy of the names!

CHAPTER TWO

“Be angry with us no more and give up the intention of sending calamity on your people...” (“Treasures of Hasidism”, p. 67)

The heirs of grandfather Mendel Tsygutkin.

1. My uncle Dovid-Meyer. My father’s elder brother was born in the colony of Nadezhnoye. At 21 he was called up for tsarist service. After his service he returned home and started a family; like everyone in our family he acquired a trade. He was a good carpenter, wheelwright and cooper, and could make household utensils. He built a house in our village. The elder of the neighbouring Greek village of Gocharikha, knowing my uncle’s professional skills, invited him and his friend to work in their village. For this a permit from the district chief was needed, because the village was outside the Pale of Settlement; the permit was not granted.

Dovid-Meyer was a desperate man; he told the district authorities: “I may serve, but I may not work where I want; I spit on your laws...!” He and his friend got their

documents in order and left for Argentina. At that time this was a feat! It happened in 1912. Until 1921 my father received letters and photos. He wrote that he and his friend had rented land and gathered a good harvest, that they lived well and the children were at school.

...It may very well be that we have close relatives in Argentina. Contact was broken after 1921, because having relatives abroad was unsafe. In the forms for getting a job, entering a school and so on there was a question: “Do you have relatives abroad?”

P.S. My children, Lena and Misha, visited South America in December 2008, including Argentina. It turns out there is a bureau there that searches for relatives. Maybe we will be lucky?

2. Aunt Dvoira-Vera. She married a good man, Israel Sher. Before the revolution he was a well-known contractor for transporting equipment from the Azov ports; he owned draught animals and ran a carting business, delivering equipment for English, Belgian and French firms to the metallurgical and chemical plants being built in Ukraine. He did not bother with small jobs, only cargo from the ports. They carried it from Mariupol and Taganrog to Yuzovo, Makeevka, Konstantinovka, Enakievo, Gorlovka and elsewhere. Their centre, the place where they lived, was the large colony of Khlebodarovka, Volnovakha district.

At that time and after the revolution Israel understood “the situation”, sold off his business and moved to Gorlovka, where all his life he made soft drinks. They had no children; they died before the war.

4. My uncle Isaak Grigorievich Tsygutkin. Born in 1893 in the colony of Nadezhnoye. Until 13 he went to kheder and finished the two-class school. After that he was apprenticed to a tailor. He mastered the tailor’s craft well. In 1915 he was called up for tsarist service and soon got to the front. He took part in the Brusilov offensive and for his merits rose to the rank of corporal. In 1917, after the revolution and the collapse of the tsarist army, he, like many of his age, returned to the colony, and not “empty-handed”. The main events took place in 1918.

It was an anxious time in the Jewish colonies; panic rose; Bat’ko Makhno appeared, and smaller “bat’ko” atamans. Every scoundrel gathered a gang around himself, declared himself a “bat’ko”, and they began to rob and kill in the colonies. But there were brave lads too, former soldiers.

They organised themselves into small detachments, which they called “self-defence”. Among these brave fellows was my uncle Isaak; he was then about 25. When rumours spread about pogroms in the Jewish colonies, a “Self-defence” was organised in the colony of Nadezhnoye, and since our colonists were no cowards, the young people began to arm themselves; many had weapons. As an

expert in military matters, a front-line soldier and corporal, and of course for his soldierly bearing, Isaak Grigorievich was elected commander of the self-defence detachment. About 20–25 men joined.

The detachment fought its first battle, if it can be called that, at the end of 1918. After heavy drinking, gangs from the village of Gocharikha (now Krasnaya Polyana) and the village of Petrakivka (these villages are 10–12 km from our colony) decided to “loot” the Jewish colonies, starting with our colony of Nadezhnoye. “Intelligence” knew in advance that they had set out. A friend of my father (father was in the detachment as head of intelligence), Fedir Zima, ran over the night before and told my father to expect “guests” in the morning. The commander decided to meet the uninvited guests at the boundary between our colony’s land and the village of Petrakivka. The fight was short; the bandits had not expected the colony to have a self-defence. It was the advance party of young thugs, a dozen and a half on horseback; the main “forces” came on carts, well drunk, to loot the Jews.

The horsemen were instantly disarmed and tied up. It turned out there were acquaintances among them, the villages being close; they had listened to Makhno’s agitators and of course local Black Hundreds men, and decided on this action. Those on the carts took more work; one bandit grabbed a sawn-off rifle but was killed on the spot. The whole gang was brought to the colony, to the square by the cattle pen, and judged. There were hotheads among the Jews who demanded that their carts and horses be taken and that they themselves be flogged and released. Isaak Grigorievich, vested with authority, decided according to “the law”, as befits a commander, and no one dared contradict him. In the presence of the whole colony they were interrogated, and it turned out that their villages had indeed been visited by emissaries and agitators of Bat’ko Makhno; there were also instigators, Black Hundreds yes-men, and a sea of moonshine. By decision of the assembly they were shamed and reminded that from time immemorial they had lived side by side as good neighbours should. They repented and promised to tell at home what they had done and that it would not happen again. It was decided to confiscate the weapons and let them go in peace with their carts and horses. The commander’s authority became indisputable; the news of the gang’s defeat reached Bat’ko Makhno himself.

After the defeat of the gang in the colony of Nadezhnoye, or, as people said, Vilner, a huge number of people from the surrounding settlements came running. Baking bread and feeding them was organised by activists and the synagogue.

The self-defence forces grew with the newcomers. The detachment included not only Jews; there were Germans, Otto Val and Iogan Berzheminsky (I remember them well). There were also Ukrainians born in our colony who spoke Yiddish. My father mentioned Grigory Gorban and his two sons, Pavel Masleev and his son Stepan; I remember them too. A frequent guest was Fedir Zima, a resident of that Ukrainian village Petrakivka. It was he who ran over, or rather the priest sent him,

not wanting strife between neighbours, to warn the self-defence that “the khokhly are getting ready to rob the zhidy”, and that they had decided to start with the rich colony of Nadezhnoye.

...My uncle Isaak, a silent man by nature, hardly told anything about that time. After aunt Anya died he moved to Donetsk to be nearer his relatives. In Gorlovka, where he had lived for almost fifty years, no relatives were left; his son Grigory Isaakovich served in the Soviet Army. Uncle came to visit us and we him (he had taken up with a woman of his age), and then, with great difficulty, I made him tell what he still remembered of that time.

In the 1950s uncle told me that he had by chance met a comrade from his regiment in the Civil War. It turned out that this comrade received a personal pension as a Civil War veteran, and a substantial one, about 2.5 times the ordinary pension.

I was then serving in the Soviet Army, and on leave I visited uncle and he told me about this. In his name I wrote an enquiry to the central archive of the Soviet Army and Navy, which is near Moscow in the town of Monino, and delivered the letter personally. Some months later an answer came, which

said that “Isaak Grigorievich Tsygutkin did indeed in 1918–21 take part, with the rank of company commander, in combat on the fronts of the Civil War in the 5th Army. The military unit in which he served took part in the defeat of General Mamontov’s cavalry corps, which sought to capture Moscow, and in battles against Denikin’s troops.”

According to this document: “I. G. Tsygutkin is recognised as a participant in the Civil War and is entitled to a personal pension.”

Can you imagine the faces of the khokhol officials of Gorlovka reading the answer from the archive? What, a Jew took part in the Civil War? Impossible! And so on. Uncle was granted a personal pension of republican level and was paid the difference for almost 10 years!

But we have strayed. Let us return to 1918. Evidently the news of the self-defence detachment reached Bat’ko Makhno. An emissary, an envoy of Makhno, arrived in our colony; he was stopped at the colony boundary and brought to the “headquarters”. My father was present at these “negotiations” and told me a little about them.

...The Soviet government decided to enlist Makhno’s detachments in the struggle against the counter-revolution; it was decided to form the 5th Army in the areas around Gulyai-Pole, and Makhno was appointed army commander.

The self-defence detachments of the colony of Nadezhnaya were mobilised and, by decision of the commander-in-chief, concentrated in the Dnepropetrovsk area. Makhno’s gangs also arrived there on tachankas. And when the troops of Petliura,

“chief ataman of Ukraine”, began an offensive on Dnepropetrovsk with armoured trains, Makhno’s gangs scattered over the steppe and, taking their bat’ko with them, raced off to Gulyai-Pole, while the battalion of front-line Red Army men retreated in good order to Kharkov and joined units of the Red Army there. Grigory Kotovsky’s brigade routed Makhno’s gangs, and the bat’ko himself crossed the border and surrendered to the Romanian authorities.

..Isaak Grigorievich Tsygutkin was demobilised in 1921, settled in the town of Gorlovka, married aunt Anya, and in 1923 they had a son, named Grisha after uncle’s father.

My first cousin Grigory Isaakovich, born 1923, entered a military signals school in 1940. He served in air force units and fought against Nazi Germany. After 36 years of service he was demobilised as a lieutenant colonel. In 1945 he married Larisa Vasilieva; they had a daughter, named Vera after aunt Dvoira. He has a grandson Yura and a granddaughter Nastenka. After demobilisation he settled in the town of Belaya Tserkov. He died suddenly on 5 January 2007. Eternal memory to him!

But let us return to Isaak Grigorievich. All his life uncle worked in supply organisations. During the war he was head of a workshop sewing uniforms; in his last years he was director of the Gorlovka collective-farm market.

Aunt Anya died in 1970; uncle sold the house and, as we already know, moved to Donetsk. He died on 18 March 1972 and is buried in the Mushketovo cemetery in the same enclosure as aunt Anya.

...Such was this close member of our family, my father’s younger brother, Isaak Grigorievich Tsygutkin: calm and even-tempered by nature. In his youth sturdy, like everyone in our family, and short. And so another page of our family’s biography has closed: a simple man, not very educated, but endlessly kind; he loved my children very much and respected me and Vera. I adored him, and he returned it. May the earth rest lightly on him!

4. My aunt Frume-Leya (Liza)

My father’s second sister, Frume-Leya, or Liza as she came to be called, was married to a Nepman, by today’s standards a big businessman. He handled huge capital, traded in jewellery, and owned houses in Gorlovka, Enakievo, Bakhmut (Artemovsk) and Slavyansk.

What happened, no one even guessed, but he vanished overnight, taking all the valuables with him: gold, diamonds, money, having first sold all the houses and property. It turned out he had long been preparing to flee; he had a family in Moscow. My aunt took the betrayal hard and died very young in the 1920s; she was not yet forty.

...My father told me about these events, named the name and surname of this dealer, added that if he was alive he must be living in Moscow, and showed me a photo from the 1920s.

Passing through Moscow on the way to my posting in the Far East, I decided to ask at the information bureau about this man; it turned out he was alive, and I got his address. I had time, and decided to pay this scoundrel a visit; he was then over 80.

And although so many years had passed, I recognised him. I was in uniform and introduced myself. Yes, he remembered everything; he lived on the Taganka in a luxurious flat of four rooms or maybe more.

I did not listen to his "tales" about aunt Liza's infertility and that he loved another woman and so on. I only asked him: "Didn't your conscience torment you, and what did you do with all the wealth?" Finally I told him to repent, go to the synagogue and pray, if he had not forgotten what he learned in kheder, and do a mitzvah in honour of the bright memory of my aunt Liza; and some more from the military vocabulary; I slammed the door and was gone. I told my father about this the next year, when I came on my next leave.

5. My father's youngest sister, my aunt Genya

This is the most tragic page in the life of our family. Aunt Genya was the youngest, the nicest and most pleasant in our family. She married a hard-working fellow, an excellent cabinet-maker, named Solomon. They lived in the town of Enakievo.

In October 1941 we evacuated on a cart, heading for the town of Volsk, where we had been directed. On the way, through Enakievo, we called on aunt Genya. Her husband Solomon was "on the trenches"; her son, named Grisha after our grandfather, was a frightened boy; he was afraid to go into the house and wandered around the town all day. He was mortally afraid of the bombing. We were astonished! I had already been under bombing; it is frightening too, but not to that degree.

We washed, changed and ate well. Aunt's flat was on the 2nd floor, and below was a small bakery; it always smelled deliciously of fresh bread. At that time the bakery dried rusks to order. Aunt worked as a bookkeeper and gave us a whole sack of rusks for the road.

Father begged aunt to come with us; there was room on the cart, but she refused. She and her son would wait for Solomon; it was a pity to leave the beautiful furniture made by Solomon's skilful hands. A pity. The next day we set off towards Voroshilovgrad. The front line stabilised that winter; by the way, on this sector the front was held by Italians, Moroccans from North Africa and part of the Spanish "Blue" division. They froze badly; snow fell early and frosts struck.

It turned out there were brave people who crossed the front line from Voroshilovgrad to Enakievo, and, not for free of course, led people across. My father met such a man and sent a note to aunt in Enakievo. Imagine, this man delivered the note, and we received an answer that “Grisha works as a stoker in the Germans’ kitchen, Solomon has not come back yet, and her friend Marusya is hiding her”. This God-damned Marusya betrayed aunt and Grisha to the polizei, took everything from their home, and they were shot with the Jews of the town.

This tragic story was told to me in 1954 by an elderly man, aunt’s neighbour, who knew aunt and Solomon well. Marusya disappeared, fled after the shooting of the town’s Jews. I applied to the KGB of the town of Enakievo; there was no trace of Marusya, and evidently the Lord God punished the criminal.

I remember aunt Genya well; she was unusually nice, small, with rosy cheeks, a pretty figure, a little giggly and very kind, like everyone in our family. I was sincerely sorry for this family.

We lost part of our family at such a young age: Solomon was 45, aunt about 42, and the son Grisha 16. So this accursed war wiped another family off the face of the earth, without leaving even a grave.

6. And finally, my father: 25.12.1885 – 1.04.1963

My father Efraim (Efrem) Grigorievich Tsygutkin was born in the colony of Nadezhnoye. Until 13 he went to kheder and finished the two-class school, where Russian was also taught.

After his bar mitzvah he was apprenticed to a tailor. The master was a rich man who kept a workshop with hired tailors.

As was usual then, the master made him do housework and was in no hurry to teach him. But a distant relative of ours, Yudl Kozel, stood up for father, and they began to teach him from small things: sewing on buttons and other small jobs. The master’s workshop was in the rich colony of Khlebodarovka, Volnovakha district, Donetsk oblast. The master was a nasty man but a good craftsman, especially at cutting material.

By 16, with the help of the relative and the other craftsmen of the workshop, father had mastered tailoring. The relative’s help should be noted: he taught father the most difficult work of a tailor, cutting. By 17 father was already working as a master, sewing suits, waistcoats, trousers and so on. And at the same time he parted with the master.

Yudl Kozel and the other craftsmen supported father, who needed a letter of recommendation from the master, certified by the colony elder. The master resisted, not wanting to let a promising young man go, but all the craftsmen backed father, and he had to make out a document that father had passed all stages of training and could work independently. Yudl Kozel lent him 10 roubles,

and with this letter he went to Yuzovo (Donetsk), where the treasury chamber was.

Father had to pass an “exam” and prove that he was a “master tailor of the first hand”. In the presence of members of the chamber he had to cut and sew a suit. Having bought material, he sewed himself a “three-piece”, a suit with a waistcoat. He passed the exam well, though he was very nervous. He received a diploma, and from then on he was officially a professional tailor.

After the exam Yudl Kozel, who had left the exploiting master, helped him again. They agreed to work together. Father agreed to work with him for 40 kopecks in the rouble. For a young fellow this was a godsend. Father bought a “Singer” sewing machine on credit. They worked together for two years; father became an accomplished master of his trade and from 19 began to work independently. Father had “got his hand in” at cutting, the most responsible operation in tailoring. Yudl Kozel said that father could and should work on his own, and that he had become a real master.

Father chose two German villages: Memrik and Galitsinovka, now in Krasnoarmeisk district, Donetsk oblast. In these villages he thoroughly mastered the profession and became a real master; at the same time father began to observe how the Germans ran their farms.

The villages were rich, all the houses of brick, good farm buildings, and above all horses. From the Germans he understood that with proper cultivation and care, the land is wealth, the land is the provider, the land is everything for the farmer!

The real expert in farming in our family was my father! Looking ahead, I will note that after the revolution his allotment was 30 hectares; by 1930 this was already too little for him, and he planned to rent another 10–15 hectares.

But we have strayed from the chronology. In 1906 father was, as they said then, “due for call-up” into tsarist service, but a defect of his left foot saved him from service.

In 1910 he married; he was a fine bridegroom and earned well. His chosen one, Lana, was from the Svirsky family, a well-off “clan”. They were good farmers; she had two brothers, Meyer and Perets. (I remember them.)

In 1918 Lana died of the typhus then raging, and father was left with four children: Mendl, born 1911, Genya (born 1913), Ele-Khaim (born 1915) and Rakhilya (born 1917).

That same year he married, as his second marriage, my mother Ester, who had two children of her own, Aron (born 1913) and Dora (born 1915). I and all our relatives considered that my mother Ester performed a feat: she married a widower with four children, the youngest not yet a year old. We will come back

more than once to this large, close family, where there were “three sorts” of children!

We have already mentioned that father had an allotment of 30 hectares. During the Civil War no one acquired draught animals, since horses could be confiscated by the Makhnovists, the Whites and the Reds. There was a single one-eyed mare, Dunka, which interested nobody. From this one-eyed mare father’s farm began.

...By 1925–26 the farm already had three pairs of work horses. The horses, harness and tools were all bought with money earned in the German villages and, of course, from selling the harvest. Golden winter wheat was especially prized.

The children grew up; all of them worked and helped as they could. Father held firmly to the rules, knowing that without black fallow there would not be the wheat harvest he wanted, and almost 10 ha were set aside as black fallow. Besides this they sowed oats, maize, barley, millet and buckwheat. By the house there was the “plan”, one hectare: potatoes, vegetables, melons. Father brought saplings from Melitopol, and almost half the garden was planted as an orchard. What apricots grew there, “kolirovka”, and pears, plums, Semerenko apples, sour cherries and sweet cherries of two kinds, yellow and red! In a word, the house was a full cup!

The family worked hard, but there was plenty! The children studied, were fed, clothed and shod. The yard was full of livestock: geese, ducks, turkeys and chickens. A strong farm! After the harvest the grain was divided into seed (an untouchable reserve), food, the tax in kind, and the rest was sold at fixed prices.

After the revolution agricultural partnerships began to be “knocked together” in our colonies. My father did not want to deal with Jews; he knew his fellow colonists very well.

The partnership that father created included the Ukrainians Gritsko Gorban and Pavlo Masleev and the German Otto Val. It was a “collective” of like-minded men. Father, as the most literate, kept the “accounts”; they rented a horse-driven threshing machine, which had to be returned in good order after threshing.

Father determined each member’s share and decided other questions. There were no disputes among the members: everyone knew that Efraim was an honest, conscientious man; they worked together in good faith, and all were satisfied after the harvest. These were colonists of different nationalities, born right here, who spoke Yiddish among themselves and had lived side by side from time immemorial.

The question may arise: why did father not join up with his relatives, his first cousins Sholom-Zalman and Lazar Tsygutkin? After all, they lived nearby; the houses stood wall to wall.

A small digression. Father’s first cousins.

Really, why? Father had three first cousins and a female cousin; they were the children of my grandfather Girshe's brother, Yose-Meyer. The eldest was Sholom-Zalman, the middle one Lazar, the youngest Gershl, and their sister Khana-Tsipa. They lived much worse than our family; they had no farm and leased out their allotments.

Sholom had three children by his first marriage and a daughter Pesya by the second. His eldest son Mosya was killed during the war. He was born in 1913. In 1934, together with my half-brother Aron, he was called up into the Red Army; they completed a course for junior commanders and were given the rank of "sergeant". They served in the Shepetovka area. In 1936 they were demobilised, and both returned to our colony of Nadezhnoye. Mosya married and left for Mariupol. A boy was born to him, named Misha; he now lives in New York. I visited them in 2000. He and his wife Sofa have two sons and two grandsons, Mosya Tsygutkin's great-grandchildren.

Sholom's second son, Grisha, born 1915, lived in Mariupol after the war; his family was killed during the war, and he married secondly our fellow villager Lyuba; they had two daughters. They now live in Israel. Grisha died in 1988; we know little about Sholom's other children.

As for Mosya, it is a whole chain of tragic events. After the war our fellow villager Oksana Gorban told me: "Late in autumn 1941, late at night, someone knocked on my window; I was living in Sholom's abandoned house. It was Mosya Tsygutkin. Dirty, ragged and quite unwell. It turned out his unit had been smashed and the survivors had scattered, and he decided to come to our village. I washed him, fed him and told him to leave the village before dawn: if a polizei saw him, it would be the end of all of us. He told me he would go to Mariupol; perhaps he would find some relatives alive. I don't know whether he got there; perhaps he was killed on the way, or perhaps he died somewhere of hunger, cold and illness. That is all I know."

His wife Polya and son Misha managed to evacuate and survived; after the war she remarried and had two daughters.

I saw her after the war, in the 1950s. She knew nothing about Mosya's fate. According to incomplete information, all the Tsygutkins who lived in Mariupol before the war were killed during the occupation.

So the roots of the Tsygutkins, in the persons of grandchildren and great-grandchildren living in the USA, have kept the surname and live on. They are our close relatives; I keep in constant touch with them; they visited us in 2008.

For my jubilee, my 80th birthday, Misha and Sofa's eldest son Sasha dropped all his work and flew in from New York for a few hours. A very decent man and an excellent, successful businessman.

Let us return to the question raised at the beginning of the digression. Why did my father not want to deal with his first cousins?

This is what my mother Ester told me: “In 1921 our house burned down. We decided to take apart the house of father Efraim and rebuild our house. Your father asked his first cousins to help take the roof off the old house and help build a new roof for ours. Both of them answered that they would help if we gave them the ration our family received from the Joint in that hungry year. Can you imagine what it means to give away what we get for the family? There were six of us in the family, the eldest was 10 and Rakhil only three. In our trouble the Kaufman brothers, Alekim and Perets, helped us. By winter our house was repaired; these boys helped us for nothing. All his life your father was friends with those brothers, helped them however he could, and also made their clothes for free.”

...In my memory there was not a single case of father speaking to Sholom or Lazar. Here is what comes to mind; it happened in 1933 or 1934.

The district NKVD chief, Zabrotsky, called at our house and, on behalf of the chairman of the district executive committee, offered my father the job of collective-farm chairman in the village of Nayen-Lebn (“New Life”). The village had been built with “Joint” money after the revolution. Father pleaded that he had a well-run household and worked as foreman of the orchard-and-vegetable brigade in our collective farm, and proposed Sholom-Zalman Tsygutkin for the post.

They called me to run to Sholom and ask him to our house: NKVD chief Zabrotsky wanted to talk to him. That was the first time one of the cousins crossed the threshold of our house.

As for the offer to become collective-farm chairman, he agreed at once. In the colony they lived two families in one small house. By all accounts Sholom was not a bad chairman.

On reaching pension age he moved to Mariupol, where his sister’s family lived. They all perished there during the occupation. And the second cousin never crossed the threshold of our house.

It is unpleasant now to remember Lazar’s family. They had four children: Masha, born 1920; Iose-Meyer, born 1923; Khaya-Keila, born 1925; and Mosya, born 1927.

Three died of an unknown illness, and their mother and Khaya-Keila stayed in the colony; and in 1943 everyone who had not evacuated from our village was shot. The Jews who remained in the colony were saved by our German, Artur Wetzel; he managed to escape from Mogedovo station when the Germans were being sent to Kazakhstan; then he surrendered to the Germans and, as a Volksdeutscher, was appointed polizei and “collective-farm chairman” (the

Germans did not dissolve the collective farms). So Artur managed to keep them safe, and when the Germans began to retreat he hid them in a forest belt. A Ukrainian traitor noticed this and betrayed them to the Germans; all were shot. This happened in 1943.

...And about one more Tsygutkin family. Gershl, the youngest son of Iose-Meyer, own brother of Sholom and Lazar. I remember well that before the war they lived in the Greek village of Bolshoi Yanisol, Donetsk oblast. Evidently they left the village before the war. In the 1970s–80s they lived in Mariupol; two sons survived, Arkady and Misha. They live in New York. When I was visiting New York I wanted to meet them, but the brothers were not very willing, or something prevented our meeting. Arkady asked me to write briefly about our genealogy, and I did as he asked.

That, very briefly, is about the close families of our line. Nothing is eternal! They have gone to another world, and eternal memory to them. We will not forget them, and we will charge our descendants to keep the memory of our line, which is about 200 years old! My grandson Lenya is the seventh generation of our line!

To sum up our reflections, one can say that our distant ancestors had a hard life, full of deprivation, suffering, hunger and cold. Just as they began to live better, built up farms and began to eat their fill of bread, the notorious collectivisation swooped down like “Mamai”. The peasant’s rights to own land, to have his own allotment, to be master of his hard peasant labour, were destroyed.

And my father? Once, in a moment of frank conversation with me, he described his state like this: “I might as well hang a stone round my neck and jump off the dam into the water!”

Father was then 45, full of strength and energy; he had big plans to expand the farm. A “podkat”, a kind of hangar for storing farm machines, had already been built; he planned to build a second house for the growing children and an artesian well by our house, and had many other plans...

All had to be forgotten; the whole farm, earned by back-breaking labour, had to be handed into the “common pot” called an “artel” (as the collective farms were first called). That was it: the end of a well-fed life, the end of the chance to be master of one’s own labour!

A second small digression.

November 1930.

How did the semi-literate, and mostly illiterate, peasants imagine the fairy tale “of the bright future of collectivisation”? It is hard to imagine what went on in the villages and colonies of south-eastern Ukraine!

The colonies and villages seethed; people argued till they were hoarse, proving to each other what no one really knew. The poor, those without horses, were of course for the artel. They had nothing to lose, since they had nothing except a horde of children. The middle peasants, like my father, who had strong farms, kept quiet. My father kept quiet too; he was known as a strong middle peasant, one could say a well-to-do peasant. Imagine: three pairs of work horses, and the tools? It is no joke to lose everything overnight.

The agitators, foaming at the mouth, talked about “Fordson” tractors that need open space and no field boundaries. The men listened and smiled sarcastically; no one had ever seen this wonder, and how could one believe that some machine pulls a three-share plough?

Agitation for creating artels was conducted at state level, including the NKVD. The villagers had more questions than answers.

For example, no one could say what kind of association this would be. Who would work, where, how and how much? How would the work done be assessed? And above all, who would run the artel? That was perhaps the most important question. That there would be an artel, nobody doubted any more; it was said that the party had set a course for collectivising all the country’s agriculture. That was no joke. So said haver Stalin, and many knew who haver Stalin was.

Imagine our colony, a Jewish village with a few Ukrainian families and a few German ones, born in the colony and speaking Yiddish. In the village there were several “clans”: the Kofmanyaks, the Dushatskys, the Kamenyaks and others. The “smallest clan” was the Tsygutkins.

The strongest “clan” was the Kofmanyaks, shouters and brawlers, and the others were “no fools” either. It concerned the most important question, electing the chairman. I think today’s presidential elections are mere “child’s play” compared with the election of the first artel chairman in our village.

Strangely enough, the feuding between the “clans” played the main role in the election. The winner, as they say now, by a clear margin, was our “small Tsygutkin clan”: our distant relative Mikhl Tsygutkin. He was elected chairman of the artel. He was 30 at the time.

But again we have run ahead a little. On the eve of the election the authorities came to our colony, headed by our fellow villager, a friend of my father and uncle Isaak, Israel Zabrotsky. During the Civil War, as an 18-year-old lad, he had served in the self-defence intelligence. Now he had risen to a prominent post: chief of the district NKVD. He was the one charged with creating the artel, the collective farm, in our colony. That he was a fellow villager and a friend did not count.

My mother told me this:

“Efraim and Zabrotsky were having supper over a bottle and chatting peacefully, remembering the past, and suddenly he turned to the question of creating the artel. Zabrotsky said that the party had decided on the collectivisation of the peasants and there was no force that could turn it back. ‘So, Efraim, tomorrow we call an assembly of the whole village; you, as a strong middle peasant, will speak and say that you are joining the artel voluntarily and call on everyone to follow your example; and if you don’t speak, then despite your past I will declare you a kulak and send you with your family to Solovki! The party has decided on collectivisation and nothing will help. You must speak and call on the other middle peasants (we had no kulaks; there were also poor peasants) to join the artel; everyone respects you.’”

What could my father do? He had to speak, and he called on the others to join the artel.

So indeed nothing helped; the assembly of our village resolved to create an artel and called it by the incomprehensible word “Udarnik”. My elder brothers wept; they had raised and nursed the horses, and now they had to give them into strangers’ hands.

Yes, the “Udarnik” artel was created not in 1930 but the following year. People took back home all their property that had been put into the “common pot”. We cannot explain why. But it is a fact: the artel was created only in 1931.

…This was the beginning of the break-up of our large family. Unable to bear how “our” horses were treated, the eldest son Mendl left home; he went to Gorlovka; uncle Isaak got his papers in order, and he went to work at a factory as a fitter, where he worked all his life. Next Aron left for the town of Yuzovo; in 1934, it is true, on the eve of his call-up into the Red Army, he returned to the colony and worked as a tractor driver until his call-up.

Aunt Liza came to visit us and took Genya with her, and Mendl sent for Ele-Khaim. Later Genya took Rakhilya, and Dora went to study at the Smolensk Jewish pedagogical college, and we were left, the “third sort” of children of our family: I and my younger brother Abrasha-Lenya.

….So the artel, with the name “Udarnik” that many did not understand, was created. At a general meeting it was decided to create three brigades: two field brigades and an orchard-and-vegetable one. Since father knew about fruit growing, he was appointed foreman of this brigade. The first brigade was on one street and the second on the other. On the recommendation of chairman M. Tsygutkin, the foremen appointed were Isroel Epshtein for the first and Iser Khononov for the second; both were young, about 30.

They began to work, creakily at first, and later got into the swing of it. They knew they had to earn “workdays”, on which everything would be credited: bread,

garden and orchard produce and everything else. The “workdays” came to be called “units”.

Later uniform rates for the amount of labour were worked out, but at first everything was judged “by eye”. After that a uniform collective-farm agricultural statute was adopted.

Indeed MTSs (machine-tractor stations) were created. A “Fordson” tractor was driven to us, an American wonder of technology, and it really did pull a three-share plough; the Soviet power did not deceive us! The tractors “turned” the threshing machine and eased the peasant’s labour, though the main work was still done with horses.

We peasant children of 13–14 were brought in to work on the collective farm in the holidays. So I, on a cart drawn by young bulls, hauled sand 7 km from the quarry to our brick “factory”.

A brigade was created that made raw brick, and after firing they got real red brick, fit for building farm buildings.

....What did a “workday”, or, as it came to be called by the Russian word, a “unit”, mean? How much did one get per “unit” earned? It depended on what harvest there was. The “grain procurement”, as the tax to the state was called, did not depend on the harvest: the artel had 1,100 ha of arable land, and the district procurement points based the grain-delivery tax on that, regardless of the harvest, and they scraped thoroughly.

Also, the machine operators and tractor drivers were considered a “privileged caste”; they were guaranteed 3 kg of grain per “unit”, regardless of the harvest. The rest, as in the old good, well-fed years of individual farming, was set aside for seed, fodder for the livestock and a small “NZ”, an untouchable reserve; the remainder was divided by the workdays earned.

....What I remember well is the bumper year of 1937! Then there really was plenty of everything! With the grain he had earned, my father bought a modern extending table and two beds with spring bases, and my half-brother Aron bought an “Ukraina” bicycle for 6 centners of wheat, which is comparable to a “Mercedes” today.

But I also remember the hungry years 1932–33. The present president of “Nenka Ukraina”, the anti-Semite and fierce opponent of the “Moskals”, Viktor Andreevich Yushchenko, has “trumpeted” the “Holodomor” all over the world. Yes, it happened, but in our south-east of Ukraine no one died of hunger, no! There was no such thing! The “Joint” gave us what help it could, as far as the Soviet power and “haver” Stalin allowed.

...From the “Joint” a small sack of sunflower seed was received, and by decision of the assembly it, together with the key to the barn where the seed was kept,

was handed to the only man in our colony whom everyone trusted: my father Efraim Tsygutkin. On father's proposal a night guard was organised (there were weapons); there were cases when khokhly from the neighbouring village of Petrakivka tried to break the half-pood lock.

But let us return to the little sack of sunflower seed. It turned out that among the sunflower seeds there was a small amount of maize seed. The seeds were sorted and the maize seeds collected, and there were "20–25 handfuls", as my mother reckoned.

It turned out that this maize was drought-resistant and grew very well in the dry year 1932; evidently it was an American drought-resistant variety. Father rarely slept at night then, guarding this "treasure", and he kept the crop for the hungry winter of 1932–33. In a word, they gathered a good maize harvest; we ate maize flatbreads and mamaliga. In spring 1933 a whole field was sown with this seed, and later they also supplied their closest friends with it. So a new variety of maize appeared in our parts, from those few handfuls of maize picked out of the sack of sunflower seed.

Yes, 1937 was a bumper year, but it was also the year when "enemies of the people" appeared among Soviet people.

...The first in our colony to be declared a "Trotskyist" was the secretary of the collective farm's Komsomol organisation (we already had a collective farm), Velvel Svirsky. It was a shock! How can a young, 19-year-old, semi-literate collective farmer become a "Trotskyist"? But, as they said then, "they don't take you for nothing..." And Velvl was sent down for 10 years.

What happened to him afterwards? In 1941, when the Germans were already near Moscow, they began to take volunteers for the front from the camps with such sentences. Velvl, by then Volodya, agreed, and he was taken to a training centre: a few months of training and off to the front. And imagine, he was wounded several times, and for his wounds, as one who "had shed blood", his conviction was lifted. I saw him after the war, very aged; he was then just over forty. This is what he told me: "A Komsomol girl of our colony, Lyubka Masleeva, very much wanted to take his place and become secretary of the Komsomol organisation, and, as was the custom then, she 'informed' the proper authorities that Velvl had not proclaimed a toast (in Yiddish) at a Komsomol meeting to the 'great teacher and leader of all times and peoples', haver Stalin." That was enough. And Velvl was sent off to "sunny" Magadan. He learned this "news" at the time his conviction was lifted.

...Our second "Trotskyist" was Alekim Kaufman. Remember, this is the Alekim who, with his younger brother Perets, helped rebuild my father's burned house in 1918? Alekim was semi-literate but had the reputation in our colony of a well-read man.

This misfortune happened in 1938: his son Volka was in the 4th class and got an “unsatisfactory” (a two on the five-point scale). Alekim looked into it and concluded that the teacher, khaverte Roza (we had such a one, red-haired and nasty, as far as I remember her), herself knew mathematics badly. A few days later Alekim was arrested. In his shed, during the search, among all kinds of junk, they found a pamphlet by Trotsky written back in the 1920s. And that was it!

In 1948 I was given leave (I was then serving in the Far East) and I met him at Rozovka station, 30 km from our colony. He told me then that he had lived 10 years as a prisoner in Magadan; later he was released from escort and “riveted” wooden barrels, at which he was a master.

...At the height of the “Trotskyism” frenzy I was just over 10, and I could not understand what kind of “Trotskyist” Velvl Svirsky was. He had finished only 4 classes in Yiddish, spoke Russian badly, and, as they said then, “had twisted oxen’s tails all his life”; what kind of “Trotskyist” was he? And the hard-working Alekim? In a word, a seditious thought crept into my young head, but... everyone kept silent; my father, who was also trembling, kept silent, and I, looking at my elders, kept silent too.

...What became of the informers? Roza fled, no one knew where, and people tried not to look for her; it was unsafe. And Lyubka? That is a long story; still, let us pause and tell what became of the traitor Lyubka Masleeva.

So, Lyubov Pavlovna Masleeva, born 1921, was born in our colony; before the war she finished 7 classes of the Jewish school and spoke Yiddish like everyone. In ’37, in connection with the arrest of the “Trotskyist” V. Svirsky, she was elected secretary of the collective farm’s Komsomol organisation. She worked like everyone here, “sat” in the presidium at official meetings, organised subbotniks; in a word, she led the life of a leader, which she evidently had always striven for. The war rolled up to our village, and as an active Komsomol member and secretary of the Komsomol organisation she had to evacuate, which she did; a place was found for her on the cart of the teachers, the collective-farm chairman and other activists of our village.

She travelled with us; we ate together; so we reached the town of Debaltsevo. In the morning they looked for her, but she had vanished without a trace. After the war we learned that she had returned home and, when the Germans occupied our village, began to work for the Germans as an interpreter. At the same time Artur Wetzel turned up in our village and, as a Volksdeutscher, entered the Germans’ service as a polizei and, at the same time, collective-farm chairman.

So the Komsomol secretary became a lackey of the Germans. There were many Red Army men on the run then; she picked one, married him and had two girls. As an interpreter she betrayed people wandering in our parts and was present at interrogations; she knew German, Yiddish, Russian and Ukrainian. Her father,

Pavlo Masleev, who had been friends with my father all his life and with whom he had created the “partnership” in the 1920s, could not bear what the Germans and his daughter, who worked for them, were doing, and died suddenly.

But the German polizei Artur Wetzel, who kept all the Jews of our village and all who had joined them safe, got in the way of her black deeds, and according to eyewitnesses she was afraid of Artur and did not inform on him. In 1944 our colony was liberated, and she decided to make herself safe: she was afraid of Marfa Gorban, who had promised to tell our side everything Lyubka had done during the occupation. What happened that night no one could properly explain; our men, in red shoulder boards, took Marfa out beyond the dam at night and shot her. The husband, or deserter partner, was taken into a penal battalion after the liberation and did not come back after the war.

...When the Germans “ran for it”, Lyubka stole two barrels from them, of kerosene or petrol, rolled them into the stable and covered them with straw. Perhaps someone set it on fire, or something else happened, but there was a fire; the younger daughter burned to death, the elder was saved, and Lyubka was badly burned: half her face, and her left arm did not work.

After the liberation Artur Wetzel was tried, but all the residents of our village and the surrounding villages stood up for him, and he was sent under escort to Kazakhstan, where his relatives lived. And Lyubka, half burned, was left alone; God had punished her anyway. Her elder brother Stepan Masleev disowned her, and so did her elder sister, who had married the Jew Boris Dushatsky before the war and who hid children throughout the war.

...In 1948 I came on leave; my parents were living in the colony, in their own house; I learned everything, though I had known much about Lyubka’s doings before. I decided to visit her and look her in the eye. My father told me: “Don’t touch her; she is out of her mind, half burned.” But I visited her anyway and asked one single question about her life under the Germans. She evidently recognised me, but she was not human; she babbled something and ran off into the half-burned house.

...My father wrote to me that Lyubka had been found in the forest belt, hanged from a branch; it was God’s punishment of the criminal for what she had done, and good riddance. Father also wrote that at the burial ground for dead livestock a pit was dug and what remained of the traitor was thrown into it.

The “Udarnik” artel becomes the Sergo Ordzhonikidze collective farm.

So the “Udarnik” artel was renamed the Sergo Ordzhonikidze collective farm, in honour of the deceased old Bolshevik whom V. I. Lenin had respected. There were no objections; it was only very hard to pronounce the new name of the collective farm.

What happened in that terrible year we have already told, but life went on; one had to work, and work like Stakhanov, Krivonos and Mariya Demchenko. This advanced woman was closer to the semi-literate collective farmers: she was a collective farmer too, grew beet by a new method, and became famous for it.

...Our collective farm could also have become famous for its orchard and vegetable garden. The orchard was young and did not yet give much income, but the vegetable garden did, and our "produce" was valued; we had our own buyers.

On days off we took it to the market in the district centre Novo-Zlatopol; we had our own "clients" there, and our vegetables sold like hot cakes. Everything was the freshest and natural; no one had heard of chemicals then.

The head of our "team", Itsl Chertkov, sang the praises of our produce, though it did not need it. Everyone knew that the vegetables of the S. Ordzhonikidze collective farm were always of excellent quality: cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage, onions, watermelons, melons and so on.

So the head was Itsl Chertkov, and I, the literate one, was weigher and cashier: I calculated in my head the value of the goods on the scale pan and took the money. (A heavy purse hung round my neck.)

We left home at dawn, took our place at the market in the morning, and by lunchtime the cart was empty. We brought the money to the collective-farm office; the bookkeeper and cashier counted the takings. It was, as they say now, "live" money, very rare in our village; almost nobody had any. We were proud that we earned money and that the collective farm badly needed this money.

...At about the same time the rye ripened; people had no bread left. The rye, or as we called it, "zhito", was mown, and in violation of all agricultural rules each family was given a sack of grain. It had to be dried, and then to the mill. Mother baked several rye loaves whose taste I remember to this day!

No changes took place in the life of the collective farmers in recent years; they worked from sunrise to sunset, worked conscientiously, and tried to earn as many "units" as possible so as to receive what they had earned at the end of the year.

....By 1933–35 the colony had "thinned out" a great deal; many abandoned everything they had and left, but the core of the collective farm remained.

A "vydvizhenets", Aron Abramovich Averbakh, was sent to us. The first chairman of the artel, our relative M. Tsygutkin, was "moved" to foreman of the 1st brigade.

How did the "new broom" differ? First, he was a "barin". He set himself up with a tachanka for driving in summer and a sleigh in winter; second, he acquired his own coachman in the person of Kalinovsky, a German who had come, like many German families, from Siberia at Averbakh's invitation. They were hard-working people; they were given abandoned "plans" in our colony and began to settle in.

Third, an empty house was rebuilt into a collective-farm club, where meetings were held and, on days off, dances. Two musicians came with this group of Germans.

Fourth, evidently as a promoted cadre he was backed by the executive committee, and to our collective farm's two wheeled "KhTZ" tractors a caterpillar "ChTZ", running on ligroin, was added. (This is something in between: better than kerosene but worse than petrol, though petrol in those years had an octane number of 55.) By the way, my half-brother Aron Konovalov worked on the ChTZ; he was known as a Stakhanovite and earned good "units".

A few words about Aron. After he was demobilised in 1936, he married Khaya Shikhanovich and stayed on in our colony. Khaya worked in the kindergarten; that too was thanks to the new chairman, who got a kindergarten set up and brought young mothers into work on the collective farm.

So Aron worked on the ChTZ, and we children ran to the tractor brigade. Evidently this was what pushed me, in 1942, having finished a tractor drivers' course in evacuation, to work at the Pervomaisk MTS in the village of Semenovka, Semipalatinsk oblast. I managed to plough, sow and bring in the harvest, and in December 1942 I joined the Red Army as a volunteer. That, by the way, is material for another story.

What else did the new chairman introduce? Imagine: after the sowing he introduced days off on Sundays! This was something new, and everyone welcomed it.

...Life seemed to be getting better; there was bread and something to go with it; we children studied. I personally wanted very much to study. In 1939 I finished seven classes in Yiddish and planned to continue in the 8th class in the district centre Novo-Zlatopolye; there were two ten-year schools there, in Yiddish and in Russian. I chose the Russian one and never regretted it, though studying in Russian was not easy.

...News reached us: bread cards had been introduced in the cities! It was incredible: we were getting good harvests, the grain procurement was "thoroughly" scraping out our bins, and in the cities there was no bread! But everyone kept silent; such were the times. We began to sense the approach of disaster. We greeted with joy and supported the liberation campaigns into Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. Ancient lands belonging to Ukraine and Belarus were liberated; the city of Lvov and the whole Lvov oblast were liberated; afterwards Moldavia, Northern Bukovina and the glorious city of Uzhgorod were liberated. The people rejoiced; we had brought them freedom from the Poles, Hungarians and Romanians.

So we have told about the life of the 4th generation of settlers in the lands of the Wild Field; the 5th generation had already grown up and begun to contribute to

the colonists' life. For better or worse, life was getting better; young men went very willingly to serve in the Red Army and came back matured, speaking passable Russian, and brought something new into the life of our villagers.

So I remembered when a sailor, a pilot and a paratrooper came to our colony. They were our fellow villagers: the sailor Velvl Konovalov (by the way, a first cousin of my half-brother Aron Konovalov and my half-sister Dora Konovalova). In short: Vladimir Konstantinovich Konovalov, Hero of the Soviet Union, rear admiral, a famous submariner, sank about 30 vessels of the Third Reich; he died a natural death in Leningrad. The fighter pilot Captain Isaak Semenovich Meller was made a Hero posthumously; how many German planes he shot down is unknown; he was killed in battle. The third was Naum Svirsky, a paratrooper; I saw him before the war and that is all; there is no more information about him. The whole Svirsky family died during the evacuation. I was 5 or 6 at the time, but these events stuck in my child's memory.

Let us sum up our reflections on the life of the 4th generation of settlers in the new lands of the Wild Field:

a) The "voluntary" association of the peasant in fact turned out to be the enslavement of rural workers;

b) the vital questions of the collective farmers were decided not by the collective-farm board but on the instructions and "shouts" of the district;

c) The peasant was deprived of all rights to the land. Public ownership of land was fixed by the Constitution and was not subject to revision;

d) The class "Peasant" was destroyed, and the much-advertised community "Collective-farm peasantry" appeared, with no rights, tied to the collective farm, and not even having passports;

e) The peasant lost interest in the results of his labour: "Everything around is the collective farm's, everything around is mine!" Can one speak of labour productivity if you do not know its final result?

....So the master of the land was destroyed, and with him the high harvests and the country's full supply of bread. It would be funny if it were not so sad! The Soviet Union buys wheat in Canada! I think we had then "arrived"; there was nowhere further to go!? No comment is needed. Ukraine and Russia, which had fed all of Western Europe with first-class wheat, began to buy grain.

And what about the virgin lands? Where are the tons of lost grain? Because of the ill-considered policy of the "Great Maize-man" almost the whole harvest was lost. That was after the death of the "great leader and teacher of all times and peoples", the founder of the collective farms in the USSR. As for my father, he lived in the colony until 1950; on reaching pension age he moved to the town of

Stalino (Donetsk). He began to earn extra at his old trade, made clothes for the city's professors, and earned quite well.

PART TWO

"When you plan to build a house, find out who your neighbour is; keep away from a bad neighbour, do not associate with the wicked, and do not despair in disputes and quarrels." ("Pirkei Avot", "Teaching of the Fathers", p. 31)

THE COLONY OF NADEZHNOYE, KUIBYSHEV DISTRICT, ZAPOROZHYE OBLAST

...Our settlement was founded in 1824–25 on Cabinet (tsar's) lands in the expanses of the Wild Field, which had been joined to Russia under Catherine II and finally secured under her grandson Nicholas I.

Part of these lands were settled by Jews, and they, sparing no effort, developed this wild steppe, turning the Wild Field into a flourishing land. This is a historical fact!

We know that there were no landlords on these lands; the allotments were received free and were considered the property of the one to whom the allotment fell by lot; the land could not be sold; it could be leased or inherited.

....My father told me: "Around 1895 the governor of our region, General Gelert, arrived in our district with a large retinue and guard. It turned out that a complaint had reached the Senate that the Jews who had settled the black-earth lands of southern Russia were not cultivating the land and that the land had fallen into neglect.

...This happened after the sowing, at the time of weeding the sunflowers, beet and so on. Eyewitnesses told: the general sent an aide to the field where the villagers were weeding and ordered them to be brought to him. When they came, the general ordered them to show the palms of their hands to the retinue, which included representatives of the Senate. You can imagine the hands of the toilers, and the 'clean' fields worked by these same calloused hands! It did not work out for the gentlemen who wanted to grab a tasty piece. The matter had no consequences; the Jews remained the masters of their allotments as they had been." My father told me this; he remembered that episode of his life well; he was then 10–12 years old.

...Our family went on working in the colony. We have already met the members of our family above. They survived! All the members of our family built themselves dwellings and settled in that remote Wild Field. So they lived: without communications, without a hospital, without roads, and several other "withouts".

They began to look for a better life, but that was some 50–60 years later; the third generation of settlers began to search for another life and went to the cities, which were not very far away, 100 km and a little more: Yuzovka, Gorlovka,

Enakievo, Mariupol. They looked for places where it was easier to earn a living, and went still further from the back-breaking labour of the pioneers, whose main tools were only their own hands.

The colony of Nadezhnoye

What was the settlement like, abandoned on the backyards of the Wild Field?

The author decided to list and show graphically the houses and who lived in them before the war. I vouch for the accuracy; these people are no longer alive, but I remember them all, and remember where, when and who lived.

So, the layout of the streets of our village, in common speech VILNER, sometimes with the addition: “Vilner gazlonim, oder Vilner ganovim...” (that is, “Vilner robbers, or Vilner thieves...”).

Several generations of our colony lived with this nickname. So, the house numbers and street numbers:

Street no. 1

- House no. 1: Kofman Khaim-Sholom. Later the house was bought by our Germans, the Pitkovskys.
- House no. 2: Druyan Favl. The house was bought by the Yakovenkos.
- House no. 3: Khaimovich Motl.
- House no. 4: Svirsky Faivl.
- House no. 5: Svirsky Meyer. He handed the house over to the collective farm; the collective-farm chairman Pukhovich Davi lived in it.
- House no. 6: Zaprutsky Gershl.
- House no. 7: Levitan Mikhl.
- House no. 8: Tsygutkin Efraim.
- House no. 9: Tsygutkin Lazar and Tsygutkin Sholem Zalman.
- House no. 10: Svirsky Mikhl.
- House no. 11: Averbakh Aron.
- House no. 12: Svirsky Ekhiel.
- House no. 13: Levin Peisakh.
- House no. 13: the house was bought by our Germans, the Wetzels (about one of them, Artur, see above).

- House no. 14: Shmarin Bentse.
- House no. 15: Shal Naum; the house was bought by our German Otto Val.

Second row of the first street

House no. 16: Chervin Avrom-Khaim; Chervin Iosif.

(Chervin Tsemakh, husband of my sister Dora.)

- House no. 17: Itovich Iche (my father's first cousin).
- House no. 18: Itovich Girsh (my father's first cousin).
- House no. 19: Itovich Natan (Iche's eldest son).
- House no. 20: Shikhanovich Folya. Shal Naum bought the house before the war.
- House no. 21: SCHOOL (four classes, taught in Yiddish).
- House no. 22: Meller Sholem-Zalman (his eldest son became a Hero of the USSR and was killed at the front).
- House no. 23: Kaufman Perets (four sons, all came back alive; the third, Volodya, a helicopter pilot, covered the roof of the Chernobyl nuclear power station with gravel, received a large dose of radiation, and died half a year later, in 1985).
- House no. 24: Gorban Aftolomei (killed in the Great Patriotic War; his wife Marfa, on a tip from Lyubka Masleeva, was taken out of the village and shot).
- House no. 25: COLLECTIVE-FARM OFFICE (the former "cold", that is summer, synagogue).
- House no. 26: cattle pen (a fenced area).
- House no. 27: SHOP.
- House no. 28: collective-farm barn (seed grain was kept there).
- House no. 29: Urin Moisei.
- House no. 30: Konovalov Shimon.
- House no. 31: Konovalov Iser.
- House no. 32: Shulman Moishe.

The colony of Nadezhnoye, Street no. 2

- House no. 1: Khetsron Aron-Leib.
- House no. 2: Dikenshtein Rakhil (my father’s first cousin, daughter of Itovich Iche).
- House no. 3: Dushatsky Berl.
- House no. 4: Dushatsky Mikhl.
- House no. 5: COLLECTIVE-FARM BRIGADE no. 2.
- House no. 6: Rot David (our German, the collective farm’s electrician).
- House no. 7: COLLECTIVE-FARM CLUB.
- House no. 8: Meller Faivl (his wife Zlata, a “Mother Heroine”, bore 7 children).
- House no. 9: Kal Yakov (his daughter Dora (Doba), during the shooting of our village at Balabanovka in Rostov oblast, managed to run away and saw everyone shot; the oldest was 72).[1]
- House no. 10: Khononov Iser.
- House no. 11: Khononov Mikhl.
- House no. 12: a German family (I do not remember the surname; they came to us before the war).
- House no. 13: Berzheminsky Iogan (the collective farm’s beekeeper).
- House no. 14: Drabovsky Khaim-Ruvn (a shoemaker, and the only one in the colony).
- House 14a: Shikhanovich Avrom and his nephew Alesha Kofman. (At the very end of the street there was a well of “sweet water”.)
- (Continued)
- House no. 15: collective-farm workshops; collective-farm mill, which ground meal for cattle feed.
- House no. 16: collective-farm smithy (the first-hand smith was Meller Sholem; his helper, the hammerman, was Shulman Moshe).
- House no. 17: COLLECTIVE-FARM BRIGADE no. 1; power station, built in 1936 (“110ы”??? as in the text).

[1] 88

- House no. 18: Kofman Lyuba (her younger daughter Golda was married to my uncle Avrom, who was killed together with uncle Ele by Makhnovists in the village of Bakhurs in 1918).
- Houses nos. 21 and 22: Kalinovsky (I do not remember his first name; he was the coachman, the "helper" of the new collective-farm chairman Aron Abramovich Averbakh); Golos Grisha (he had a beautiful voice; after Red Army service he married the hammerman Shulman's daughter Tanya).
- Dikenshtein Avrom-Mendl.
- Meltser Zelda (she had three children, two sons, Mones and Avrom, and a daughter Rakhil; they were all somehow not of this world: clever and a little crazy).
- Houses nos. 23, 24, 25: Epshtein Motl; Khait Note; Chertkov Itsl. (This is the Itsl with whom we took our vegetables to sell in Novo-Zlatopol. During the war he was the head of the Jews in our village. They worked on the collective farm until 1943 (the Germans did not dissolve the collective farms). The polizei Artur Wetzel ordered them to leave the village, but a khokhol from the neighbouring village betrayed them, and the Germans shot them in the forest belt. A memorial sign has been placed on the mass grave.)
- House no. 26: Chertkov David. (Our collective-farm "Stakhanovite". There was an instruction "from above" that the collective farm should have such a man. He was completely illiterate but always sat in the presidium at the general meetings of the collective farm.)

Our ancient Ignatovich family split into several branches. In the colony there remained the Itoviches, the Tsygutkins and a few Khataviches. The Itoviches were the most numerous line: two brothers, Iche and Girshe, and a sister Rokhl; their children, grandchildren and already great-grandchildren all lived in the colony before the war.

Four Tsygutkin families remained: the families of Sholom-Zalman and Lazar, of Mikhl, and our family of Efroim. Of these families, those left alive are from Sholom-Zalman's: his grandson Misha and great-grandsons Sasha and Sergei; this family lives in New York. Two granddaughters, with their children and grandchildren, of Grisha (Sholom-Zalman's younger son) live in Israel. Mikhl Tsygutkin's family left for Zaporozhye after the war; and finally two Tsygutkin brothers, grandsons of Zelik, who before the war lived in the Greek village of Bolshoi Yanisol. At present their grandchildren live in New York; I wrote about them above. Lazar's family vanished; no one was left alive; Lazar himself died at the end of the 1950s and is buried in the town of Mariupol.

..Of the Khatavich surname, one family lived in the colony before the war: Rokhl Shikhanovich and her children. Her daughter Khaya Shikhanovich married my half-brother Aron Konovalov. Aron died in 1968; the whole family emigrated to Germany: Khaya, son Misha and daughter Raya, and their children. The Shikhanoviches also had an elder sister, Taibl, and a brother, Folya. Taibl and her mother died in the terrible earthquake in Ashkhabad. The Kantorovich line left the colony back in tsarist times. Above I mentioned one, Stas Kantorovich, who lived in New York and died suddenly a few years ago. I attach the obituary.

This is the fate of our ancient family. I have written what I remember from my parents' stories; my mother especially told me a great deal, and so did her uncle Dan, whom we called "Zeide". He came to us every summer, and we helped him gather herbs. He said one must lay in medicinal herbs and breathe clean village air, which Yuzovo, where he lived, did not have. This "grandfather", a polyglot, very educated, a lonely man, who had been to the Holy Land in 1912, who had seen and lived through a great deal, began to teach me, a boy of 5–6, Judaism. I understood this when I grew up. He taught me prayers, which I learned by heart, and he told the history of the Jewish people. I remembered all this half a century later, when I founded a synagogue in Donetsk and we began to pray. I did not remember it all, of course, but something stayed in my memory.

Much was told to me by the late Mikhail Savelievich Alter, a learned historian, expert on the Donetsk region, who knew a great deal about the Jewish colonies of south-eastern Ukraine.

He worked in the archives of Dnepropetrovsk, Mariupol and Donetsk. M. S. Alter was awarded the title "Honoured Member of the Geographical Society of Ukraine". Eternal memory to him! A memorial plaque has been placed on the house where he lived.

What became of the people of our colony? When I came home on leave from the Soviet Army after the war, I learned that a few families had survived: the family of my father, Efrem Grigorievich Tsygutkin, which came back to Nadezhnoye colony after the evacuation; two families, Avrom Shikhanovich's and Alesha Kofman's, which came back from evacuation to the city of Voroshilovgrad (Lugansk); the family of Sholom-Zalman Meller, his younger son Isaak, born 1920, and his elder sister Brokha and her husband Ezra Dikenshtein with their children; the family of Aizik Svirsky with children; the family of Geshel Zaprudsky; Perets Kaufman; the Vinnik family, Manya and Etya, whose parents died in the evacuation. These families lived in our colony before the war. That is all. The other families were shot at the end of July or the beginning of August 1942 near the village of Balabanovka, Rostov oblast, and thrown into an anti-tank ditch.[2] Almost all the people of our village spent the winter of 1941–42 in a German village in Rostov oblast. After the German breakthrough near Kharkov they meant to leave the

[2] 33

German village and go to the rear. And then the haggling began: go or not go? Only Zaprudsky would not listen; he whipped up his horses, drove past the tree belt and raced off towards the Don, and his family survived. The others started to wait: for what? And they got what they waited for.

In 1965 the journal “Sovetish Heymland” published an article (unfortunately the issue has not survived) by the former secretary of the German administration of the village of Balabanovka, Rostov oblast. It turned out that the Germans brought them all back to the village, and this woman, the secretary of the local administration, wrote down all their names; they were driven into an anti-tank ditch and shot with machine guns. They were people of our colony and others who had joined them. The oldest, Avrom-Khaim Chervin, was 72; the youngest, a little girl, was only one year old.

...Several families who had not left the colony stayed alive until August 1943. This “collective farm” was run by Isaak Chertkov; the polizei in our colony was Artur Wetzel, a German from our colony who had escaped from the train when the Germans were being deported to Kazakhstan; it was he who kept these people safe. When the Germans retreated, he ordered them to leave their homes and hide in the forest belt, but a khokhol from the neighbouring village of Petrakivka saw them and informed the Germans; they were tracked down and shot right there in the tree belt.

So perished the whole colony of Nadezhnoye, Novo-Zlatopol district, Zaporozhye oblast, except for a few families. The settlement created more than a century before ceased to exist. I learned of these misfortunes in 1943, when my father wrote to me at the front.

In 1954 I and the survivors, Shleima Dikenshtein (before the shooting he managed to step away from the crowd and hide in the forest belt; he and Doba Kats were witnesses of the shooting, as, of course, were the residents of Balabanovka, herded[3] to the anti-tank ditch),

visited Balabanovka. The place of execution turned out to be unfenced, with a pasture next to it. So we applied to the village council of Balabanovka to put up a temporary fence around this holy place. In 1961 we survivors decided to fence the mass grave properly and put up a small monument.

Shleima Dikenshtein, whose whole family and grandfather were killed, ordered chains for the fence from a friend at the Donetsk metallurgical plant; the concrete posts were made at the construction site where I was section chief. In all 40 posts were made, 1200×200×200 mm. A modest monument was put up. It did not say that “the Jews of the village of Nadezhnoye were shot” here. The chairman of the

[3] 88

village council proposed this inscription: “Here lie the shot collective farmers of the Ordzhonikidze collective farm, Zaporozhye oblast. Eternal memory to them!”

…When I came on leave after the war, I both recognised and did not recognise our village. Complete desolation; strangers lived in the houses where Jewish families had once lived. It was 1948, a very good year, with a good grain harvest, all brought in on time; I arrived at the end of August and spent my birthday, 17 September, at home with my parents.

My feelings were divided: I was glad that our old house had been put in proper order, that my parents had recovered and were living well; at that time their grandson Misha Laevsky, the son of Dora and Tsemakh Chervin, was staying with them. I was also pleased with how my parents looked. Father worked as the collective farm’s supply manager, and it was no small farm, and mother baked bread for the field brigades. I will never forget the taste of mother’s bread!

And the village? It was no longer the same colony of Nadezhnoye! Those living in the houses of the murdered Jews took little care of them: if the house hasn’t fallen down, fine. I told the chairman of the village council, my pre-war friend, the war invalid Stepan Kalinichenko, to order the houses to be put into proper shape, as before the war: beautiful, front gardens full of flowers, houses whitewashed; whereas now there was complete desolation, the village overgrown with wild grass. He promised to take measures. My leave came to an end; mother kept asking when I would come home; I promised to get demobilised at the first opportunity, but six long years passed before I, grown up, a fully established man, came home. But more about that below.

……I promised my heirs to write memoirs about my childhood, boyhood, youth, coming of age and the years that followed, right up to the emigration to blessed America, where we were received as dear guests and provided with everything. Live and rejoice!

I am endlessly glad that my children and grandchildren have found themselves here, that they have work, that my grandchildren are finishing university, that I have met good friends on my way, and that I have met a good woman, Nyusya, with whom, I think, we will “sing our swan song!”: we will live, enjoy every day of life and ask the Almighty for health; we need nothing more!