



CENTROPA

JEWISH WITNESS TO A EUROPEAN CENTURY

PHOTOGRAPHS, DOCUMENTS AND LIFE HISTORIES
FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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City: Sofia
Country: Bulgaria
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I remember my grand-grandmother [on the maternal side]. She was a very beautiful, big woman with a nice bonnet on her head. She lived with her younger daughter, who was looking after her. She was disabled. She herself wasn't very well-to-do, but her sons supported her, they took care so that she could live in luxury. I remember her meeting me in a very nice manner. She used to draw small surprises like sweets and fruits out of her pocket every time I visited her. There was always something in her pocket for me.

My grandfather Samuel Baruh [on the maternal side] was a chazan [cantor]. He maintained the temple [everywhere Elza calls the synagogue "a temple"] in the town of Vidin, his whole family around him, all of them strongly religious. So was my mother. He [Elza's grandfather] used to wear something like a dress-coat, a black clothing and an ordinary black hat. He dressed very well at those times.

There was a water pump in their house and the whole neighborhood used to pump out from there because the water was mellow. They had a wonderful yard with marvelous quince trees. The house was old but very well-kept. They had some hens and a dog. They didn't have any domestic helpers for the garden and the household. Their younger daughter looked after them till the end of their lives. They were a model family for the whole town. My grandfather was strongly religious but he didn't have any political views. He was a modest person; he didn't take part in the town's political life.

We used to play in the temple's yard. My other grandfather, Alfred Aladjem, was a more modern person. He used to stand on the stairs in front of the temple and throw sweets to the children. I was the youngest one and I could never reach for the sweets. He was watching who had taken a sweet already and who hadn't talk_n one yet and next time he would throw it so high that it would fall right beside me. And the elder children would scuffle me in order to take my sweet, but he would throw it to me again.

He had a drive for medicine. He was sort of a medicine man, he fixed broken legs, hands, and he treated with herbs also. Once a cart came with a child, wrapped up in a rag. The child was half - dead. He [Elza's grandfather]



My father (Mosko Aladjem) is sitting in the centre. He has been awarded with a medal for bravery during the war. He has been a hostage in a cage, and the photo was taken after his liberation, in the day of his decoration. His comrades in arms are standing next to him. They are also from Vidin but I can't remember their names.

A man, who was his comrade in arms, wrote a book dedicated to his heroism.

opened her mouth, saw that her throat was aching and that she hadn't eaten for a couple of days. My mother had cooked fricasse with white chicken meat. They cut some small pieces from the meat and poured it with the pap. And, little by little, my grandfather fed her with a teaspoon. She fell asleep and, perhaps, in an hour or two she said that she was very hungry and my mother prepared a big slice of buttered bread for her. She ate it and it seemed that her temperature had fallen. That is how the child cheered up and off they left for their village. After a few days her father came and brought two white chickens. He wanted to feed us in return, showing his gratitude in this way. He treated not only broken bones, but also venereal diseases with herbs. Therefore he was very popular in the town.

I don't remember my grandmother [Dora Aladjem] on the paternal side. She wasn't alive at the time of my birth. On the maternal side - she [Vida Baruh] was a very clever woman, she loved to knit and embroider. There was a wooden bench in front of their house and she used to sit there devoted to sewing, knitting and embroidering. [Elza has a memory that her family on the maternal side participated in the Russian-Turkish Liberation War of 1878.] My grandfathers both have taken part in the Russian-Turkish War for the liberation of Bulgaria. My father was born at that time.

My best memories are from my hometown. (It is still in my heart and many times my husband and I have been to Vidin, we have traveled with the steamboat to Lom and Rousse, and back to Sofia.) At the time of my childhood Vidin had a European look - because of the river and the harbor, and because of the customs as well. It was a large frontier town. All foreigners used to stop there before they start travelling around Bulgaria. It is a lovely town. Its garden is something magnificent. The Baba Vida's towers [a historical sightseeing in the suburb of Vidin] are also well preserved. All the time they fix them, so that they wouldn't collapse, and the temple - I mean the Jewish synagogue - it has the sound of an opera, its acoustics is opera-like.

The Jews in Vidin used to live in "Kaletó". It was a famous Jewish quarter. There was a cinema hall in "Kaletó". Dances took place there constantly, people used to gather in that hall. There was only one synagogue, but there was a Jewish community with administrative officials and a chairman of the consistory. I remember they did circumcision [Brit Milah] to the boys as well



My father, Mosko Aladjem, and my mother, Buka Aladjem, are in the hunting ground of Vidin. They were very young and very good and very beautiful. I had wonderful parents, extremely sensible people. This was our walk in the park, we used to go there on foot.

as celebrations of the 13th year – a very special birthday party [she is obviously talking about the Bar Mitzva celebration]. It happened in the temple [the synagogue] in the presence of almost the whole community. And it was very beautiful. They put tallith [prayer shawl] on them and they gave them the Ten Commandments to carry them around the temple [the synagogue].

There wasn't any anti-Semitism in Vidin, even in deportation times; we felt no difference at all in the attitude. The military band used to pass through the town and we were running after it. The whole "Kale" crowded after the music and walked it to the center of the town. And in the center there was a monument of the soldiers perished in the war. Each time the music was escorted to that monument – both by the children and the adults. People saw it to the monument and I remember it very clearly, yet I don't remember any patriotic song.

Friday was the market day and all the villagers from the villages around Vidin came to sell their products. My mother used to buy large baskets with cherries, apples, etc. I remember very well the cherries because after she had given the basket back to the man who was helping her, she would spread a rag (we had one very cool room). Then she would raise part of the carpet and spread the cherries over that rag, so that they wouldn't rot. We didn't have any particular merchants to shop from. But they knew [each other] - the village people and the citizens. And the merchants used to put aside part of the products for their regular customers because someone would come and buy it.

My father [Mosko Aladjem] wasn't strict - he was a very good man. He has never hit me; neither my brothers nor sisters have been punished. He wasn't strongly religious - he kept the official holidays from time to time. He visited the synagogue and used to wear a silk tallith, a very sheer one.

My father was presented with a medal for bravery [Elza could not specify during which war – the Balkan War, the Inter-Allied War or World War I]. A man, who was his comrade in arms, wrote a book dedicated to his heroism. My father had been a hostage in a cage (I don't know if I am saying it in the right way) and a French man, who showed him the way from Thessaloniki to Yugoslavia, liberated him. There my father got in touch with the Jewish com-



This is my mother's mother - my grandma Vida Baruh. She was a very good and clever woman, she loved to knit and embroider. There was a wooden bench in front of their house and she used to sit there devoted to sewing, knitting and embroidering. She used to knit nice socks for all her grandchildren.

munity and that is how he escaped from the camp he was placed in. He loved telling us this story. He was telling it because he wanted to encourage us to be as brave as he was. The whole town was talking about his courageous deed also.

My father was a radical in his political affiliations. He traveled to Sofia quite often and here [in Sofia] a minister named Kostourkov met him. Recently I was at a neighboring family's place. Surprisingly I saw the minister's portrait there and I was introduced to his daughter. This happened after all these years.

[My father] won the elections for a deputy-mayor of the town and for several years he was a deputy-mayor indeed. I remember that when they wanted to overthrow him, they broke all the windows of our house and my father left a notice: "Please, my children would get ill. I want my windows repaired." And in two days a workman came and fixed the windows without a single coin given from my parents' side. My mother covered the windows with rags and quilts because it was winter and we were very young.

My mother [Buka Aladjem] spoke Spanish [actually she means Ladino]. She used to speak in Spanish to us but we always answered in Bulgarian. My father didn't allow us to speak in Spanish at home. He was a politician and wanted his children to keep abreast of the time. (I have no memory of my parents talking about where they have come from.) I know that at those times his education was of average level. He was a certified public accountant. I don't know what it means [on oath] but I know that they asked him very often to the court for consultations.

My father spoke Hebrew and so did my grandfathers as well as my mother. They have all graduated from the Jewish school. My parents met in a very interesting way. They used to tell the story for fun. He liked her, as a girl she had been very beautiful and a friend of theirs would advise him not to fish for that girl because they wouldn't let her marry him. But he popped the question and they gave her to him. She must have liked him, because they loved each other so much. Till the end of her life she was very neat and elegant, she sew by herself. She often said humorously that she didn't need education, because she knew the centimeter well. And from the oldest dress she would



This is my sister at the age of 16-17. Adela Isakova by marriage - Adela Aladjem is her maiden name. Here she is at a shop in Vidin. It was a large shop that used to sell hats, scarves, shirts, stockings there.

make for me, who was the youngest at home, the most beautiful one. They always bought me patent leather shoes, because I couldn't use the ones of my elder sisters.

In my father's house we didn't have water pump and we took water from a neighboring house. When my father became a deputy-mayor, they placed a pump and an electricity lamp in front of our house. It was a well-known fact and in the day after he was overthrown from the town council, they removed the pump. The fact that a Jew had become a deputy-chief was a great success. I don't explain this to myself with anti-Semitism moods within our town. There has hardly been such a thing.

Our house was a very old small house, though it had 4 rooms. It wasn't a brick-made one but built of adobe. We had a really very nice yard where my siblings and I actually spent our childhood. My mother was a housewife and she had never worked in her life. She was the one to take care of the cooking, shopping, cleaning and any kind of domestic work. As we didn't have any servants, Mum used to look after us also.

My grandfathers and my grandmothers, my parents associated with the town's elite. My father kept company with Bulgarians. He communed with them very intensively. My father's friend was a lawyer [Atanas Minkov] and they were inseparable friends. Our families were very close.

We lived in a Turkish neighborhood. Many of the houses were Turkish. Next to ours there was "kapidzhik" – an interstitial door between the two houses. He [their neighbor] was a director of the Popular bank in Vidin, he had two children I used to play with, his wife had graduated food processing industry in Germany and they were very intelligent people. My parents associated with them neighborly.

They [Elza's parents] have always associated with their relatives. Men used to visit each other during the holidays. As well as women with their handiwork: my mother would take her knitting stitch and would go to, for example, one of my father's sisters and they would help each other. If she were making noodles, my mother would cut the flour and would spread it. She was helping her as a daughter in law. [According to Elza her mother felt com-



This is the Jewish school, which my sister Adela used to attend. She is in the lower row, sitting, 6th from left. She is holding me in her lap. I must have been probably 4-5 years old. We used to play there, in the schoolyard, just like the children do now.

fortable within her father's family, which has been big and united.] My relatives didn't part.

My father was an administrative secretary of the Jewish community. We kept all the Jewish holidays. A special cooking was done for each holiday – the proper kind of sweetmeats was prepared. We weren't very rich, but we had [enough].

We observed Shabbat [Jewish Sabbath and seventh day of the week. The holiest day of the Jewish week] very strictly and every Friday evening we went to the synagogue. (My mother was a chazan's daughter, she was strongly religious and she particularly insisted on that.) My father was a worldly person but in spite of his modern views, he also used to regularly visit the synagogue on Friday.

We absolutely kept the Friday meal. We ate vegetable soup and meat-filled peppers. At Pesach [Passover] we observed the matzah [unleavened bread], actually not matzah but boios [in Ladino - small loafs of bread made from matzah]. The matzah came later on. In the first evening we used to gather at my grandfather's place [the chazan, on the maternal side] and we used to sing very beautiful and inspiring songs [she doesn't remember exactly what songs]. We did kiddush [blessing recited over wine at Sabbath and at festivals] at home although my father didn't taste any alcohol at all.

We celebrated the New Year as [Yom] Kippur [Day of Atonement], we often did tanit on the day – we kept the fast, we didn't eat on that day. My mother was very strict about that day. We were supposed not to eat on that holiday as long as we could – even if it was for several hours only. Even now – not for the whole day, for several hours only – but I still keep it.

We didn't have a nanny or a governess. All my brothers and my sisters attended the Jewish school till the 4th class. At the age of 12 they sent my brother Alfred Aladjem to Germany in an art school. After graduating from it, he continued with the academy. At the time when he graduated from the academy, he had a girlfriend, a musician. His voice was a beautiful tenor. She strongly insisted, so he graduated from the conservatory as well. Unfortunately at those times a Jew could not perform at the opera. He didn't have the right to.



This is a Jewish nursery school. We didn't study any religious rules. It was like an infant school. We used to go there for 3-4 hours a day. My cousin with her little brother is standing next to me. It was nice, we used to learn songs just as they do in kindergartens today.

My brother often had concerts here and there, yet he never became a real opera artist.

My other brother [Asher Aladjem] graduated from a high school in the evening-classes. It was after the 9th September [9.IX.1944 was the day the communists officially assumed power in Bulgaria.] My sister graduated from an economic school, the one of the priest Mikhailov. She worked as an official, so did my brother. He was a personal department's head in the geological researches.

I attended the Bulgarian school. "Naicho Tzanov" was its name. My teacher's name was Zora Neeva. She was one of the best teachers – she was a radical, by the way [Elza refers to the fact that her teacher had the same political affiliations as her father had], and they were friends. She was "an old miss". She never got married. She taught general subjects. Here [in Sofia] I studied in the First high school. There haven't been any anti-Semitic acts from teachers' or students' side. I've never taken private lessons. My father was cultured enough to help his children.

I graduated from a Bulgarian school. [Elza doesn't remember anything particular about her friendships from the school years.] It was quite common in the past – first at a Jewish school, and after that – the secondary and the higher education - in Bulgarian schools. I personally haven't studied Hebrew or religion, but [my siblings] have. My parents didn't teach me anything special in religious sense. As she was a rabbi's daughter [her mother], she used to keep holidays such as Yom Kippur and she insisted on her family keeping them, too. For the boys – Bar Mitzvah of my eldest brother was like a wedding, but they didn't do one to Asher. He used to say that he hadn't celebrated that day, therefore he couldn't grow up. That was his usual excuse when he got a poor mark at school.

I had an aunt in Berkovitsa and we often visited her – for several days, perhaps, a week. I loved to embroider Bulgarian laces. (Currently I am knitting a bedspread for my youngest granddaughter.) I was 7-8 years old when my father came to Sofia together with my mother to visit one of my granny's brothers. That was the first time I went to an operetta. I even remember its title – "Klo, klo".

Another most interesting thing was to climb up with an elevator. When we settled in Sofia, my sister started to work in “Father Frost”, that was the name of the shop. And next to it there was dressmaking and tailoring atelier – it was on the 3rd or the 4th floor. She [Elza’s sister] had to go up to bring an invoice and she took me with her. I climbed up not knowing what I am getting into but with a lot of inspiration. After all, I was in an elevator. Even now, when I climb up with our elevator, I feel it the same way.

It wasn’t easy during the Holocaust, it was almost devastating. First of all, because we didn’t have the material base to provide _ur living without being permitted to work. My brothers were in the forced labor camps. I was only 19 and my sister was 21 and we had to work. A friend of my father – Atanas Minkov – a famous lawyer in Vidin – helped my mother and found us a job. It is true that it was a very hard work – in a brickyard. A very hard physical labor for our age, but we worked. The director respected us, helped us. There was quite a distance between Vidin and the brickyard. He was passing in a cabriolet, regularly picking us on his route and dropping us right before the brickyard so that they wouldn’t see him and blame him for supporting Jews. I will never forget him. His name was Zdravkov.

We weren’t allowed to go out in the street. We had a fixed evening hour and we couldn’t go to work. At that time we used to live in “Timok” street and our landlord was a military officer. I can hardly explain how big his heart was and how good he was. He was helping us in every way. We couldn’t buy bread, because as soon as we went out in the hours permitted, there would no longer be bread. He supplied us with bread. And when they were about to intern us from Vidin, my mother made for each one of her children a small dowry. At those times you were supposed to have something aside for the time of your marriage. She arranged all these things into a chest, she listed them and she left everything to that Bulgarian officer together with the jewels she had. Later on, [he] became a minister plenipotentiary in the Czech Republic [Czechoslovakia at that time] or in Poland. He was a very intelligent man. He had graduated in Turkey. His name was Vladimir Panov. He might be still alive. I don’t keep in touch with him, but he did to us a really very big favor. Bulgarians weren’t bad people, not at all.



This is a photo of my mother with her two sisters. One was Lika and the other one was Diana. The three of them were very beautiful ladies, very beautiful women. You have to look only at their hair-style - it is so fine. They used to do it by themselves, there haven’t been any hair-style’s shops at those times. They used to help each other. Lika is the first one from the left to the right. My mother, Buka Aladjem, is in the centre. The other one is Diana. Lika used to lovely knit and embroider just like my mother did. Everything is in laces at home.

My father was removed from Vidin to work in Sofia - in the Sofia municipality. In the years of the Holocaust we were allocated to Pleven first. But that lawyer – Atanas Minkov – came from Vidin to Sofia. My mother called him on the phone and told him that they were interning us in Pleven and he came here, in the Jewish commissariat and arranged for us to go back to Vidin. It was because my father was a famous person and he had a lot of friends, who helped my mother and us to survive, otherwise we couldn't have made it. The interning, I think it lasted for 2 years, ended when the war was over. When the "Fatherland Front" was settled, they gave us permission to come back to Sofia.

During the internment I came to Sofia with a badge. My colleagues from the "Rila" factory wrote to me to come to a celebration and they paid my travel expenses. I didn't have any money, besides I had to receive money from the factory, because they couldn't give it to me as I was interned in very short terms. I was allowed to come in one evening to Sofia and return within 24 hours. A colleague of mine, my master invited me to sleep at her place. I objected that her husband was a cop. In the end, in spite of the fact that he was a cop, he walked me to the station next evening. He bought me a ticket and committed me to a man he knew and I traveled in safety.

When we came back home after the end of the war, we didn't find anything - not a single spoon, not a single fork. We didn't have any knife. My brother found one. Some very poor people have moved into the house we used to live in. They had cut even the wardrobes to make fire in the stove. And those were three most beautiful wardrobes made of walnut tree. I remember I used to look at my reflection in the doors of the wardrobes when I was passing by them. Everything was ruined, the whole house. People thought that we wouldn't return and let such poor people in our house. We couldn't get back there. My brother found another house in the "Veslets" [street]. And that's where we lived.

When I met my colleagues, it was as though someone from the high society had entered the factory. Almost the whole weaving workshop came out [to meet me] because I had come. And I had even come in the early hours, at 8 o'clock, because I had the intention to start work immediately. It was like a celebration. That's how my colleagues met me, and during the interning they



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supported me all the time in every possible way by constantly sending me parcels, money. We stayed in Bulgaria because my mother didn't want to leave my father's grave. My elder sister and my elder brother left and meanwhile I married a Bulgarian. He [her husband] was Bulgarian – Anani Rizov, with two degrees.

We met in a very odd way with my husband. There was a tram in “Poduene” [a quarter in Sofia] – one was coming from “up”[the hill] and the other one was coming from “down”[the hill]. [And] there – on the crossroad we met with my husband. He waved with his hand from his tram and that's how we met. When I came back from the deportation, he had become a chief of a department in the factory. We knew each other though accidentally [he] was hanging on me [was making passes at me] as a bachelor. He greeted me but [actually] he had a reason to know me – his brother-in-law and his sister worked in the factory and probably they have spoken about me. We met in person during one brigade and never parted again. We got married after the war.

I have a very good memory of my husband's family. They met me very cordially. They knew me before we got seriously into marriage. His brother, who crashed with a truck, was about to marry and I was invited to stand godmother with my husband and my brother. In the mean time, my husband's sister showed eagerness to become the godmother. I saw that she had a greater desire than I did moreover I wasn't part of the family yet. I gave up in her favor and because of the fact that I wasn't angry, his parents appreciated what I did as noble, as an act of a good person. So they accepted me really very well.

My father-in-law, he was also an old communist from 1923 [Elsa refers to the September uprising from 1923 inspired by the communists and quickly crushed by the authorities]. His views were more modern, but my mother-in-law wanted me to become converted to Christianity. Then he [Elza's father-in-law] jumped to his feet from the chair and told her not to interfere into our private family matters. So we never spoke again of converting to Christianity or something like that.

Since the end of the war [World War II] and during my whole life I have



This is my husband and I a few days after the end of my internment, when I came back to work. In the factory we formed a brigade in order to build a road. It was quite muddy, it had been raining during the whole day yet we worked. That is where I met my husband.

worked as a weaver. I have never had any problems with the fact that I am a Jew. I have always been very well accepted both by the Bulgarians and the Jews at my work place, the “Bulgarian silk” factory. I will never forget how they met me after the internment. I felt almost like a queen.

We were all members of the BSP [Bulgarian Socialist Party], at that time – of the BCP [Bulgarian Communist Party], we didn’t share our father’s political affiliations. We had our own beliefs and we are still in touch. I am still a member of the party. After the war I returned to the same work in the production, only not in the weaving shop but in the expedition, in the dyer’s department. I got married on 18.01.1946 after a year of love, it was love at first sight and we have lived together for 52 years. I can say I had a very good life and a happy marriage. We helped our children to study and buy houses. They both have apartments. We also bought a house.

We didn’t keep the Jewish traditions at our home. We celebrated Christmas and Easter – the Bulgarian [holidays]. Now, at 80, I bought a cookery book with Jewish recipes. It is now that I showed such interest. I cook likewise my mother and my husband accepted [it] very well. All the meals my mother used to cook, I learned them without being particularly interested. Once my husband got ill with a very high temperature and I didn’t know how to prepare even soup for him. I had no idea at all, because I went to work and I wasn’t interested in the household stuff. So I asked my elder sister to come and cook something for him because I couldn’t keep him hungry at home. She came and she forced me to do it myself. Of course, she stood next to me all the time. So I did it and since then I have learned to cook.

My daughter [Sonia Doneva] was born on 13.10.1946. She graduated from the Machine and Electrotechnical University, textile engineering - her father’s profession. She is interested in any information concerning the Jewry; she has [Jewish] friends and constantly keeps in touch with them. My son [Georgi Rizov] is less involved in these things. He was born on 8.11.1955. He is a military doctor and doesn’t commune with Jews to such a great extent. He does with the relatives – with my nephews, my sister’s children. Especially with Mosko and Ethel, my brother’s ones.

I have been a member of “Shalom” organization for many years. Not only



This is my wedding. Our marriage lasted 52 years. I was very happy with my husband. I have a wonderful family. I have two children, they both received a very good education. My daughter, Sonia Doneva, is an engineer and my son, Georgi Rizov, is a doctor. My husband here is still with his first degree as a textile engineer.

now, but since the Jewish organization exists I have been its member. I attend the “Health” club together with elderly Jewish women. I also participate in the “Elderly” club. I cannot recognize my circle of friends as only Jewish. I have friends here in the neighborhood. We sit on a bench every afternoon, we share things and we are inseparable.

I visited Israel before 1989, before the fall of the Berlin wall. It was in ‘58. I don’t have acquaintances living abroad or in the USA. In ‘58, when I was there [in Israel], there was a war. I don’t remember how they called it – probably the “6 days war”. It was very frightening. I was to stay there for a month but I stayed for 3, even 4 months instead. I couldn’t come back. There was some kind of an exercise [a military one] in the Bosphorus and Bulgarian ships were not permitted to pass through it for 4 months. My child couldn’t go to school. I was with my elder daughter there. The factory’s director sent a letter to the [Bulgarian] embassy in Israel so that they would help me to travel by plane, which was very expensive. Neither my sister could afford it, nor me, but from the embassy they could arrange it and I had to pay it off from Bulgaria. My sister told the ambassador that I could stay at her place as long as I wanted to.

The second [trip to Israel] was in ‘88. My nephew paid for my ticket. I resembled his mother and he wanted to see me as he left when he was very young and we didn’t keep in touch. My brother and my sister also got tickets along with me. We were his guests for 15 days, after that we had to leave. But the other relatives opposed it – the money was spent so and so, then why we should leave so early. And a cousin on the paternal side invited us for another 15 days. I stayed at my mother’s younger sister’s son until my departure. So I was there for 3 months. The others stayed at their own relatives whom I wasn’t related to.

I have survived the war and for me it was good that this wall [the Berlin wall] fell down. It was good that roads were open so that people could travel and live a different life – not only in Bulgaria. People have the opportunity to study abroad, to move, to change their lives.

[Democracy brought] not very many good turns. My son-in-law, for example, my daughter Sonia’s husband - he has been unemployed for 4 years



The military officer in the picture is a cousin of mine. His mother is Jewish. During fascist times I used to wear a star. I couldn’t go out for a walk in the town, yet I used to go out in his company, he took me very often for a walk. He said that it was his responsibility. His wife is beside him. She is still alive. He died at 92. After the World War II we continued our acquaintance. We were very close and we remained friends.

already and he is a man with two higher education specialties. He has graduated in “Internal-Combustion Engines” and from the Economics [University] in Moscow, as a second specialty, he was seen through the state, too. But he couldn’t use his education. This fills me with indignation – that there are so many unemployed people. It is true that we have lived in a more modest manner, with very small salaries, yet we were able to see through our children for their studies and to build a home. I don’t know if it is proper to say this or not. We had small salaries to live through. Probably life [was] cheaper. Now life is very expensive and with that poor pension I have, I couldn’t make it if it wasn’t my children. They are not obliged to help me, neither is his wife [her son’s wife], nor is her husband [her daughter’s husband]. They are not obliged to. I have deposited money. My pension is my saving. The state doesn’t give me money. They received some 12% interest for my money as they deducted it from the small salary I had.

I don’t see any difference between the Jews before and after the war. They have always supported each other. It exists initially in the commitments of Moses – to help each other – both materially and spiritually. I often visit the “Shalom” center, when there are concerts or an interesting meeting there. I receive support from “Joint”.

Elza Rizova lives in a simply furnished two-room apartment. Her home is neat and tidy. The portrait of her recently deceased husband hangs up on the wall in the living room. In spite of the fact that officially she lives alone, Mrs. Rizova is surrounded by her children, grandchildren and grand-grandchildren. Her daughter lives in the neighboring apartment. Her son visits her every day at lunchtime. Mrs. Rizova leads an active life for her age– every day she picks her youngest grand-grandson from the kindergarten. Her elder grand-grandchildren spend with her their time after school. And last but not least, she visits two times a week the remedial gym classes at the “Shalom” center.

Elza Rizova is a small woman with a white, shortly cut hair and blue eyes. She speaks slowly and quietly. She gets exhausted very quickly. She is “afraid” of the tape recorder. She becomes chatty after it is already switched off. She usually tells her most interesting stories at the front door after the visit is over.





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