

# *Life Lessons*

*from*  
Holocaust Survivors

Пережившие Холокост  
Рассказывают...

Jewish Family Service  
of San Diego





*“Remembrance is the secret of redemption.”*

—Baal Shem Tov

*Life Lessons is a compilation of interviews with 44 Holocaust Survivors, conducted between 2019 and 2020 by the Care Management staff of Jewish Family Service of San Diego. The interviews were conducted by geriatric specialists, guided by a set of prompts. Survivors were asked, “What have you learned from life that you would like to share with others?” The publication of their responses is an affirmation that their stories and experiences will live on to inform and inspire others.*

Funded by  
Jewish Federations of North America  
and Friends of Jewish Family Service of San Diego



Jewish Federation  
OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY



The Jewish Federations  
OF NORTH AMERICA



# *LIFE LESSONS*

## From Holocaust Survivors

A compilation of interviews with 44 Holocaust Survivors in San Diego County  
conducted in 2019 and 2020 by the Care Management Staff  
of Jewish Family Service of San Diego

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## PREFACE

This book, of the life lessons of forty-four Holocaust survivors living in San Diego, is for you—

- ✚ Survivors who participated in this project to see that your auto-biographical reflections are in print and that your stories and experiences will live on,
- ✚ Family and friends of the survivors to learn more about the survivors in your life,
- ✚ Members of the San Diego community and others to learn what life has taught this diverse group of Holocaust survivors, and
- ✚ People who work and volunteer with people who have experienced trauma to learn about a strength- based modality of care.

This project was a response to a request for grant proposals from the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA) developing new approaches to Person Centered Trauma Informed (PCTI) for Holocaust survivors. Jewish Family Service (JFS) is profoundly grateful to JFNA for the majority of funding for this project.

*Life Lessons* is the product of interviews conducted over two years. In 2019 and thru mid-March 2020, JFS staff interviewed survivors individually and then held follow-up small-group meetings. Participants benefitted from the opportunity to share and discuss their life lessons with a small group of other survivors. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most of the second year's interviews were conducted by telephone. The small group meetings could not safely be held. Questions were modified to be more suitable for this period of isolation.

The survivors and their families, JFS staff, and the community-at large appreciate Jewish Federation of San Diego's commitment to sharing these *Life Lessons* in digital form on its web site.

This project is, most of all, the result of the caring JFS Care Management staff listed below. Each of these PCTI-trained individuals took to heart the various responsibilities, including coordinating individual and group meetings, interviewing, transcribing, conducting pre- and post-program surveys, translating, and editing:

	Tanya Livshits	
Brae Canlen		Margarita Ferdman
Alina Orlyanskaya		Yakov Shuster
Katya Teplitsky		Jahana Vinter
	Naomy Bachman	

Thanks to all of them, my vision for this project was made real.

We all are honored with the gift of being able to bear witness and learn valuable life lessons from survivors

Hedy Dalin



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# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Ana Fuchs**



*Ana Fuchs, age 85, in San Diego*

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1936 in Northeastern Romania, close to the Russian border. In 1942, the Nazis invaded my town, Bacau, and sent my father to a forced labor camp. All the Jews were forced to wear yellow stars and could not leave the house before 11 a.m. By then, there was very little left to buy in the market.

"We lived in fear of the soldiers banging on the doors and window shutters with their bayonets. Whenever that happened, my mother would hide my two sisters and myself. We couldn't leave the house to go to school or the doctor. We lived that way until 1944, when the Russians liberated us. I met and married another Holocaust Survivor in Romania and we emigrated to Israel. It was during the Yom Kippur war and that was a very difficult time. We only stayed in Israel for three years and then immigrated to the United States. We raised two children together and have six grandchildren."

Interviewed by Brae Canlen



# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

“My experiences [during the war] made me strong and more courageous.”

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

“I keep busy. I take a class in painting. I walk three to four miles a day.”

- **This is what makes me sad**

“In the U.S., people still say bad things about Jewish people. There are still anti-Semites here.”

- **This is what makes me angry**

“When you go through what I’ve gone through, very few things can make you angry.”

- **This is what makes me happy**

“Living in the United States. I’ve lived on three continents and it’s the best country in the world and I’m blessed to be here.”



*Ana with her husband Charles, her two children, and their spouses.*

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

“My love for my family.”

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

“I’ve always known that after a storm the sun will come out.”

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“Seeing the next generation study in school and grow up to be nice people.”

- **This is what makes me worry**



*Charles and Ana Fuchs*

“Anti-Semitism.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“People have learned a lot about what happened in the Second War. It’s not something you can forget: six million people dead and the way they died.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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*Ana with her husband Charles in Hawaii*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“My mom always told me the most important thing was family. So, I will do absolutely anything for my children and grandchildren.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“I learned that my mom was right. My children never gave me any trouble, and they raised their children the same way I raised them. My son and my daughter both work in careers where they help other people.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“The war made it a different kind of childhood for me. You never knew when the [air raid] alarms would go off and you would have to hide from the bombs. So, my mother had to know where I was at all times. You could not go sleep overnight at someone’s house.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

“It’s important to have friends. You can see other people’s point of view. I have a friend who is a Survivor. We talk about art. She lost all her family in the Holocaust. It’s painful for us to talk about it. There comes a time when you don’t want to start back up with these things. We’d rather talk about our children.”



## 4. Connections with the World

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*Ana and husband Charles*

- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**  
“My mom practically raised a neighbor’s child, who lived across the street from us in Romania. So, the closest person in your life might not be your sister, but your neighbor, so be good to them.”
- **This is what I have learned about community**  
“I see the community as the people who love what I love. I go to classes for painting and I’ve found so many people who embrace the same things that I do: art, music, books, movies.”
- **This is what I have learned about society**  
“When I came to the U.S., I didn’t have a penny. The only place on the planet where you can be whoever you want to be is the United States. Nowhere is better than this country.”
- **This is what I have learned about the world**  
“Most of the people on the planet have a country and [therefore] it’s important for Israel to have a country.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**  
“My life’s work is my children and grandchildren. I want to see them develop into good people.”
- **This is what I care about**  
“My health and my passion for art and my love for my family.”



*Three generations: Ana, her daughter Violet, and granddaughter*

- **This is what I think about luck**

"I don't believe in luck. What you do in your life makes you lucky or not. It depends on your thinking."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

"Our generation went through a lot of suffering and had a hard life. For them it's much better, and that's what we wanted for them. We made a lot of sacrifices to make their life better."

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"You choose your path in life. It's very important. If it's possible, stay true to your beliefs. You have to work hard and fight for what you believe in."



# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Charles Fuchs**



*Charles in San Diego*

## **Short Biography:**

“In 1942, when the Nazis invaded Romania, my parents tried to send their children to stay with relatives in the countryside, but the police found us. They deported my family to make an example out of us. We were sent to a work camp in Transnistria. It was two months after my bar mitzvah. We stayed there for two years, until the Russians liberated us in 1944. I married my wife Ana, also a Holocaust Survivor, in Romania. We emigrated to Israel and then the United States with our two children. I have two master’s degrees in Electrical Engineering from the U.S. and from Israel, and I worked at Hughes Aircraft until I retired in 1994.”

**Charles Fuchs died on January 20, 2020.**

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I learned that it didn't help me to hide the fact that I'm a Jew. Trying to assimilate doesn't work. You will always remember what your religion was when you were a child."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"Keep your mind busy and your body busy. I have a goal: to reach 100 years."

- **This is what makes me sad**

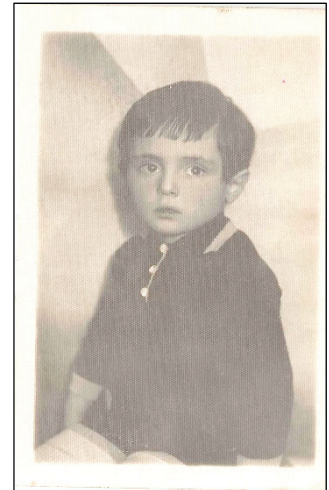
"The world is still divided by religion, and that's too bad. There's still hate in the world. Not enough peace."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"Jewish people made some mistakes, but it was 2,000 years ago. It's time to forget it."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"Freedom. No one knocking on the door at night. No one having to hide."



*Charles as a boy*

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"Believing that something will happen, or someone will come along and help you. Everyone who died in the concentration camps thought they were going to survive up until the last minute."

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

"I get my strength from my country, from the U.S. I know that what happened in Europe can never happen here. I have hope for a good future for everyone."

- **This is what makes me worry**

"We see more and more people who want to bring people like Hitler into this country."



*Charles and Ana Fuchs*



- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“More education might be the key to less hate.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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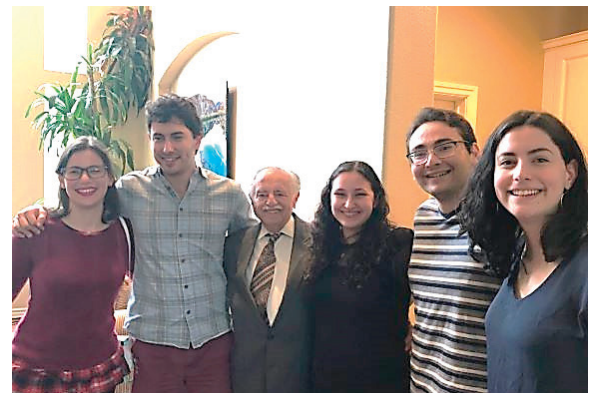


*Charles with his wife, children, and grandchildren*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“My father had seven sisters and brothers and one sister was sick. All of the sisters took turns caring for her. And when I was a child, and I was weak, my aunt took care of me. Because my parents were busy working. She forced me every morning to drink a glass of milk.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“I’ve always known that family will care for you.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“When I was sick as a boy, and in the hospital, my friends visited me and encouraged me and made me feel like I was alive again.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“When I moved to Israel, there was a friend from Romania already living there. He acted as my guide. He told me where to go and what to buy. He made me feel at home.”

### 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about community**  
 “I’ve been able to meet other members of the Jewish community at [Jewish Family Service], at the Copley Café events. Also, some Romanians, which has been good, to talk to them.” *Charles Fuchs with five of his six grandchildren*
- **This is what I have learned about society**  
 “People think freedom is something that belongs to them.”
- **This is what I have learned about the world**  
 “The world is divided mostly by religion, and that’s too bad.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“Helping other people.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“Luck depends on your thinking. Most people, when they make mistakes, they claim they are unlucky. But it’s just a mistake.”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

“The older generation made sacrifices for them. We have so many things that are the result of a previous generation’s accomplishment.”

- **This is what matters**

“If you’re smart, health is the most important thing. If you’re stupid, weather is most important.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“Life is good if you have a positive view.”



*Charles with his parents and sister*

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Ira Gorondi**



***Ira Gorondi, 78 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in Ukraine in 1942, which was the same year my family had to evacuate our city because of the Nazi invasion. What stands out to me the most about the war is knowing that my mother was pregnant with me while she fled the bombings in order to make it to Tashkent. The weather was harsh and the food was scarce. Once we made it to Tashkent, my grandmother had to sell all of her valuables in order for us to survive. After the war ended, we went back to our city and I finished my studies and became an agricultural biologist in a lab which I supervised. Eventually, I met my husband and we had two daughters. Sadly, my husband died in 1990 and I had to provide for my family all by myself. My daughters were able to get a good education, and became successful professionals, and I am proud of that.”

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman



# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I am very independent and strong. I raised my children to be successful all on my own and I made sure we had a good life. I value my friendships and enjoy having a social life."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"Although I am an independent person, I realize that as I age, I *Ira in her youth* need my children to help take care of me. The older I get, the more I have to rely on other people. But I am a social person and that keeps me going."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"Old age makes me sad. I cannot do as much on my own and I depend on others for help. I am 77 years old and things are getting more difficult because I have more illnesses. I cannot travel as much as I used to or do everything with ease."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"Nothing really makes me angry. I have a great apartment. I do not expect anything from anyone. I am financially stable. I am grateful to be in America. I have family and friends."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My kids and grandkids make me happy. My granddaughter visits me often and she is very smart and talented. I am proud of my grandson for graduating college and getting a great job. I am happiest in the company of my family and friends and I like to travel."



## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**



*Ira in Ukraine*

“My family gives me hope and strength during difficult times; particularly my grandkids who visit me often and care about me.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“I mainly worry about my family and their well-being. I also worry about getting older, although in America it is not as difficult to age as it would be in the Soviet Union. Another thing I worry about is the future of the world in general. In Russia, the government controls the media and the way people think. In America, we have freedom.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“I hope that my family is healthy and happy, there is nothing more important to me. I also hope that the world becomes a more stable place.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friends & Family

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*Ira with her husband Stepan*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“I realized that I had a lot of freedom when I was growing up. I was always allowed to do anything that I wanted with my friends and I had a very vibrant social life. That shaped me to be a social person my entire life.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“My mom was only 61 years old when she passed away and I realized just how short life is. I used to live with my mother when I was raising my own children so after she passed away, life became very difficult without her.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“I had a close group of friends and we were very social and active. We got together often, and I really enjoyed my childhood because of the social life I created for myself.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"I really don't have "friends" today, they are more like acquaintances. I created memories with my friends from the past. Childhood friends stay friends in old age because we have memories and history. Today, I depend on my family. Acquaintances have their own families, memories and problems."

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"I care about my neighbors. We are all from different places and get along well."

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"I like my community because there is a place to walk, places to go, things to see. I have a lot of friends in this community as well."

- **This is what I have learned about society**

"I want there to be peace between people in society."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"I am against wars. I want peace between people, and I want people to get along."



*Ira going to a party*

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

"My kids and grandkids give my life meaning. Their success in life makes me feel proud."

- **This is what I care about**

"I care about my relationship with my family and my friends and spending time with people. I care about culture and music and seeing new places."



*Ira on her wedding day*



- **This is what I think about luck**

"I am lucky that I came to America because I am well taken care of here. The people here are kind and treat older people well. The government takes care of older people well too."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

"My wish for future generations is to have peace so that people do not have to know war."

- **This is what matters**

"Peace, quiet, no conflict is what matters and that my kids are successful."

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"My life in the U.S. is good and I can't complain. People here help others and I am grateful for that."

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Ursula Israelski**



*Ursula in San Diego, with a statue of Bob Hope*

## Short Biography:

"I was born in Berlin in 1936. Between the ages of five and eight, I hid with my Mom from the Nazis in an attic in Belgium until someone turned us in. My mother ended up in a concentration camp, and she died shortly after she was liberated. I was smuggled out, and for the next 15 years, I lived in a series of foster homes and orphanages throughout Belgium. Most of them were not nice places. At the age of 18, I emigrated to Israel and worked on a kibbutz. Eventually, I ended up in the United States. My husband passed away 16 years ago. I am very close to my son, who lives in Tijuana."

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**  
“There are things you want to forget but can’t. They will always stay with you.”
- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**  
“I stay busy with volunteering. I also go to the gym, do yoga, and work out with weights.”
- **This is what makes me sad**  
“I try to stay in touch with some of the kids from the foster homes I lived in, but I haven’t heard back from some of them lately.”
- **This is what makes me angry**  
“I saw a man lying on a sidewalk the other day and watched people drive by without anyone stopping to call the police. I couldn’t believe it. I stopped and called the police and stayed with him until they came.”
- **This is what makes me happy**  
“It makes me happy to be good at something. At the kibbutz I was known for my ironing skills! I think it instilled a love of volunteerism in me.”



*Ursula wearing a dress her mother made for her*

# 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**  
“Music. When I was a child, hiding in a backyard [from the soldiers], I remember hearing Handel. From that day on, I’ve had music in my head. Music can take me away from a bad situation.”
- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**  
“Keeping busy and keeping my mind focused. I get up in the morning and I try to have a purpose.”



*Ursula (left center) at the age of 12, living in a group home*



- **This is what makes me worry**

"I worry about everything. I'm never late. I pay all my bills on time. I think it comes from growing up and trying to be perfect all the time. I worried about becoming a citizen and now I worry about misplacing my citizenship papers."

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

"Talking to friends. Getting involved."

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

"I hope things will get better, but I don't know how. Hatred is worse now than it used to be. I don't see it getting better."

### 3. Connections with Others – Friends & Family

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*Ursula with Holocaust Survivor  
Salomon Schlosser*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

"I didn't really think about family when I was a child because I didn't have one. I didn't have brothers and sisters. I didn't know they had been taken away. I wasn't even sad. I didn't know any better. I lived in the moment."

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

"When I was eight years old, they took me to a private home with 40 kids. It was horrible. I moved from home to home, 11 or 12 places. They were like prisons. Because I didn't have a family, I never learned family values. It's like I'm cold inside."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

"There were all kinds of kids in the places I lived. I didn't know most of them well, but I did have a friend named Eveline. She was from Antwerp. She was like a sister to me. We stayed friends for many years."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"My friends now are very materialistic. It's all about what they can get, what they can buy. I wish they were more down to earth, and not so negative."

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**  
“If you think some neighbors don’t like you, don’t take it personally. Some neighbors are nice, they wave to you, but that’s it. Everybody is basically on their own.”  
*Ursula at the “Ruth: Remember Us Holocaust exhibit*
- **This is what I have learned about community**  
“I think it’s important to volunteer. I’ve volunteered at the library for many years. I speak to schoolchildren at the Jewish Academy about my Holocaust experiences. It makes me feel good. It gives me a reason to get out of bed in the morning.”
- **This is what I have learned about society**  
“Too much importance is put on money. On materialism. I like things to be simple. [Because] you can have a lot of things and be miserable. One [change] I’d like to see is fewer computers doing things for us. I want to calculate things in my head.”
- **This is what I have learned about the world**  
“The world is awful. It’s bad, like Armageddon. Because there’s more and more people and we can’t get along. The governments are corrupt, like in World War II. I’d like to see more democracy. Millions of people are displaced. Kids grow up and they’re taught to shoot [other] people.”

“Anti-Semitism is on the rise, and it scares me. [It’s] in Germany, but not just there, and not just with Jews. People get brainwashed. Why do we let them wear swastikas? You have to stick up for what’s right.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**  
“If I can volunteer and help out, it gives me pleasure. I [also] care about animals. My cat passed away last year. I can’t have a pet now, so I feed the pigeons. We’re not supposed to, but I do it anyway.”  
*Ursula's mother*

- **This is what I care about**  
“Animals. I love animals!”
- **This is what I think about luck**  
“Things don’t just happen. When the Germans found our hiding place, my family was sent to a place that looked like a huge airport hangar. Then they loaded us into big Army trucks. They picked up everyone but me. I was only four years old. I don’t know to this day how I got out of there or who took me. Maybe you can call that luck.”
- **This is what I want future generations to know**  
“History. A lot of kids have never heard of the Holocaust or the Battle of the Bulge. Kids are not interested [in history] now. They don’t learn it at home or even at school. [Instead] they watch action movies. Or they’re on their computers.”
- **This is what matters**  
“Don’t repay evil with evil because it will never go away.”
- **This is what I have learned about life**  
“You need to get along with other people. Not everyone is going to like you and you’re not going to like them so be yourself. Don’t repay evil with evil because then it will never go away. Just live and let live.”



# Life Lessons-2019

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**Name: Emma Khatsernova**



## Short Biography:

“I was born in the city of Tamashpol, Ukraine in 1928. Ten days after my birth, my family moved to Moscow, Russia. In June of 1941 we went back to Ukraine and WWII started. My family evacuated to Moscow in 1943 where I continued to go to school and graduated in 1946. The same year I was accepted to the University and graduated in 1952. I got married in 1951 and lived in Moscow until 1991. I was working as a General Manager at the Central Laboratory. I have two daughters. The oldest one was born in 1953 and the youngest was born in 1960. I have three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. “In 1991 all my family immigrated to the US, where I was a volunteer at the Immigration Department for 18 years. I was married to my husband for 59 years.”

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I am a trustworthy person and a devoted friend. Despite my age, I have had a friend since the 6th grade. I also have a friend, with whom I have had a friendship with for 60 years. I am a fair person, if I am wrong, I will always apologize. I am a very kind person, if I learned some new and useful information, I will always share it with my friends. If someone needs help, I am happy to help as much as I can. I learned that being trustworthy, devoted and kind is great since people have the same attitude towards me. I was a devoted daughter and my mother was just like third child since she was sick a lot. We lived together, and I took care of her. My children witnessed all of it and now they treat me very well."



*Emma at the JFS event*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I love to dress up nicely. I was a General Manager; therefore, I had to attend meetings and dress professionally. I love to have a nice haircut and manicure which makes me feel good. I had a healthy lifestyle by doing lots of sports activities. I was very active and motivated to walk, run, jump, etc. Even now I like to walk and stay active. I think because of my active lifestyle I am still alive and well."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I am sad that my mother passed away 20 years ago. She was my best friend and we shared everything together. Sometimes I am sad when I just finished reading a good book. I am sad that it's over. I am very sentimental. It's also so sad that my husband passed away and cannot share a beautiful life with me in the U.S."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"Gossips, lies, human greed, when people teach each other all the time and that only their opinion is the right one."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"A good book, a good poem that I understand the feeling of it and share the same points of view. Going shopping makes me happy. When I dress up, I feel so much better and beautiful. The most important that I am happy about is that I am alive and well, can see my family and have a beautiful life here in the U.S."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"My optimism, I always think that life changes all the time. There is a 'black stripe and a white stripe'. I am not going to stop during difficult times and always believe that right after the 'black stripe' will be the 'white' one."



*Emma at the History museum in Julian*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"I had a wonderful husband, who always supported and defended me. I had an extraordinary mother, who was my best friend and our great relationship lasted through all my life."

- **This is what makes me worry**

"I am very sorry that I am so old. I live in the U.S. and enjoy my life! I would like to live until 100 and be in a good condition mentally and physically. I also worry about the situation in Israel."

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

"The way I feel. I get up in the morning, make breakfast, dress up, take a bus to attend the Russian program at College Ave Center. I am INDEPENDENT. I do not have to morally and financially support my children and grandchildren. They are very successful professionals."

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

"I hope that my family members will love each other. I hope that my great-grandchildren will outgrow professionally their parents and will achieve much more. I hope for the well-being and prosperity of the USA and Israel."

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
*Emma at the College Center Avenue*  
“My family was not religious, but I always knew that I am Jewish. Unfortunately, I did not get any Jewish education. I would love to learn Torah since it carries a lot of light and great thoughts. I learned the truth about my father, who cheated on my mother and moved out. Despite that my mother took him back when I was getting married. “
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“When I got married, I learned about my husband’s family and about the religion. His family kept Kosher, prayed, and celebrated Shabbat as well as attended a synagogue regularly.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“I had a Russian girlfriend for a long time and one day I felt that she is Anti-Semitic towards me. She disrespected me, and I discontinued my relationship with her. I do not understand when people betray each other. It’s very unpleasant to be disappointed in friends.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“I have to be very patient with my friends. It is important to know the difference who is your real friend and who is just your acquaintance. Unfortunately, we do not have many real friends. I only had two best ones. Unfortunately, many of my friends already died. I have never shared my personal information with them since I was afraid of it. I did not even share personal information with my husband. There is no need to let people, who are close to you, know about your feelings and thoughts.”

**Emma Khatsernova died without having completed sharing her story.**



# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Alla Ledvina**



## Short Biography:

"I was born in Odessa where five generations of our family lived. I was seven years old when WWII began, and I remember how the German aircrafts bombed the city. My father was injured and sent to the hospital. He was able to help us evacuate our family when the last ship from Odessa left the port. We were put on a train in Sevastopol and had to travel for a month to get to Karaganda. Our life in Kyzyltau (200 km from Karaganda) was very difficult. We lived in the same room with 17 strangers for six months before we got a separate room. It was very cold in the winter, and we always tried to get food for the family. In the summer, my grandma began to grow vegetables and it really helped. We returned home when the occupation of Odessa ended in the end of 1944."

Interviewed and translated by Jahana Vinter

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**  
“I’m a strong person. When I was a teenager, I spent two years in bed. I had to study very hard to get an education, but despite all the difficulties, I finished school with honors and graduated from college.”
- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**  
“My husband passed away eight years ago, and since then my life has changed a lot. I try to keep myself busy and find new activities. Occasionally, my friends and I go to museums or to the movies. I like to walk along the beach with my son.”
- **This is what makes me sad**  
“I feel sad when people disrespect each other. I do not like it when people are impolite. I feel very uncomfortable.”
- **This is what makes me angry**  
“I’m a very sensitive person and am worried when someone treats me with disrespect.”
- **This is what makes me happy**  
“I am happy when I spend time with my son and granddaughter. My son visits me for the weekend, and I love our walks and conversations. My granddaughter calls me often and I love talking with her about everything.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

“Talking with my children brings me comfort and hope. Each of their visits brings me great joy. Sometimes I call my friends and talking to them distracts me from my problems. I live alone, but my computer and books are with me every day. This is my window to life: news, interesting programs give me hope, and sometimes advice on how to deal with problems.”



*Alla with her son*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"I was very sick when I was young, but I was able to get my high school diploma without attending a school. I was able to have a baby, despite the restrictions of doctors. Of course, my family, and especially my mother, supported me very much during these challenging times. But I was able to overcome all the difficulties associated with my health, yet only because of my willpower."

- **This is what makes me worry**

"I am very worried and offended when I feel like people are giving me judgmental looks or talking to me in a rude manner. Sometimes I cry because of that, but I will never answer to people with the same rudeness. I also care about my health and the health of my loved ones. The bad news about health upsets me deeply."

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

"I want my family to be all right. I want them to be healthy and all their dreams to come true. I want peace now and always."

### 3. Connections with Others - Family & Friends

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*Alla with her husband*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

"I was born in Odessa in 1933, and my entire family was also born in Odessa. My mother was an accountant, and my father worked at a factory. My grandmother on my mother's side lived with us. My father went to war in June of 1941. In October of 1941, my family evacuated to Novorossiysk by ship. We were bombed on the way to Novorossiysk. Then we were put on a train (*Teplushka*) to Karaganda, Kazakhstan for a month without water and food. Instead of a toilet, we used a bucket and dumped it along the way. We all slept on a bunk. One day at the station we were told that the train would stand for two hours and my mother ran to the nearest village for food. The train started earlier; my mother stayed there. Mom was lucky that kind people drove her on a sleigh to the next station and she was able to catch the train. When we arrived in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, we took a sled to Kyzyl Tau for another 200km. We left Odessa hastily and did not take winter clothes with us. It was winter and I did not have boots, only summer shoes. In

Kyzyl Tau we lived in one room full of 17 people. We did not go outside because of the cold, the temperature outside was -50 C. We were often dug out from under the snow, the door swept with snow. Later, my mother, my grandmother, and two of my aunts lived in a room measuring 12 square meters until 1944. I was given handmade boots ('valenki') so I could go to school. My mother nearly drowned twice in a sleigh pulled by bulls. She was saved twice. In the beginning of 1944, we moved to Chimkent for 9 months. We returned to Odessa in late 1945. My father was killed near Stalingrad in 1943. Our apartment was given to other residents. But since my father fought and died at the frontline, we were given 2 rooms in our apartment without a bathroom and kitchen and a separate entrance. In 1948, I broke my spine. I laid in a plaster bed and in a plaster corset for 3 years. My mother laid me on the table to bathe me. My teachers came to the house once a month and gave instructions how to learn. After two years, I could walk, but I had to wear a plaster corset for another 3 years. I graduated from high school, but I could not get accepted to the university because I was Jewish. I graduated from a technical college with a degree in economics. I was sent to work in Kherson, at the plant, as economist. I lived in a dormitory for 2 years. When I returned to Odessa, I got accepted to the Institute of National Economy. After graduation, I worked at the plant as economist, and then as a department head."

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

"I met my husband at a parade. After 4 months, we began to date. We got married when I was 24 years old. A year later, my son was born. We lived in the same room as my husband's grandmother."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

"My best friend was Tanya Dikol. Her father was a Frenchman. She helped me a lot while I was ill and visited me with her brother."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"When I was married, my husband and I had mutual friends. Some still live in America, and I communicate with them by phone."

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"When I broke my spine and lay in a cast, our neighbors helped my mother very much to



*Alla with the friends*



look after me. People were genuine after the war. Mom would take off her dress and give it to someone in need, our neighbors always helped each other, when they went for groceries, they took them to everyone. I remember the first Easter in Odessa after the war. The entire street was full of people and they were crying with joy. Then people began to change, they became crueler.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“During the war, we lived in exile in Kazakhstan, in the distant village of Kyzyl Tau, which was located 200 km from the railway. Weak women and children were sent there. We got there after several days on a sleigh. We and several other families settled in one room; the toilet was in the yard. Everyone was sleeping on a bunk, it was -40C outside. Everyone went to the toilet in a bucket and then dumped it outside. In addition to the residents of the Kazakhs, kulaks who were dispossessed by the Soviet government and deported from their native places still lived in the village. They turned the local Kazakhs against us by telling them that we established the Soviet regime and sent them here. One day my grandmother went to visit a local Kazakh woman to exchange goods for milk, and she warned my grandmother to not visit them anymore because she was afraid of being killed by the former kulaks for helping refugees. But she gave milk to my grandmother and did not take anything in return. However, when the locals later found out that we were just poor refugees, they began to help us.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“When I compare the society in Odessa to the one here in America, I prefer more America. Even if they say that the people here are smiling insincerely, I still enjoy their smiles. I have been living in this community for 17 years, and all my neighbors are from different nationalities. Yet, no one gave me a single bad look throughout that time. We are all friends here. For the duration of time, I lived in the United States, no one ever said anything bad to me. In Odessa, I graduated from school lying at home in a cast. Teachers came to my house to teach me free of charge. Many teachers came with a smile, but there were a couple of teachers who felt indignant that they had to teach me at home. When I applied for college, the school principal went with me when I was taking the entrance exams although she had hundreds of other students. I passed all the exams except for the Russian language exam. I was told to show my passport, and when I said I was Jewish, they failed me on the exam. As a result, I was not accepted to college. After that, I did not want to live for a long time. I was not allowed to leave home as everyone feared for my safety.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“When I lived in the Soviet Union, many were not allowed to travel abroad, but a group from our factory and I were allowed to visit Czechoslovakia in 1978. We had an evening of friendship with the Germans. We sat at different tables. We were served nice meals compared to those that I used to have. However, compared to what the Germans were served, the difference was like day and night. I felt offended, but our group had vodka

that we brought with us. The Germans came to our table for a drink, and then we all danced together. I understood German and heard how they called women from our group “goons”. I told them in German that I understood everything and the German guy, who was dancing with me, left me alone on the dance floor because he was ashamed. Another case occurred in Czechoslovakia, where we were given small daily allowances of local currency. I went to the restroom, and I was asked to pay. I gave all the money I had and asked them to take as much as needed because I did not understand their currency. The employee asked me if I am Russian, and I answered yes. Then she told me, ‘We do not take money from the poor’. I was very ashamed and offended.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“My family means the most to me at this stage of my life. When I was younger, my priorities were my job, my husband, and my family. Now I live alone and meeting with my loved ones gives me emotional support. I miss my husband. He was so intelligent and very erudite. We had many things in common and always supported each other. We got married six months after we had met.”



- **This is what I care about**

“I am very empathic to those who are in sorrow or in need. If I can help someone somehow, then I am happy to do it. I am always willing to share my knowledge or experience with others, especially when it comes to health.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“I was lucky to have my parents. I am grateful for them and for everything they have done. I felt the luckiest when I got a good doctor who helped me with my broken spine. I did not want to lie in a cast and feel like I didn’t want to live, but my doctor was able to persuade me that everything would be fine. We did not have money to pay him, but he still came to our house voluntarily. Meeting my husband was also very lucky, and he did not care that I was wearing a plaster corset and fell in love with me for who I am. Another incredibly lucky situation was when I gave birth to my son without any complications.

“I was lucky to have met the people I know. They treat me with the same kindness I showed them when I first met them. My career at the factory was also quite lucky. I started working at the said factory when I was 23 years old and made it all the way to the position of supervisor. I do not know whether I obtained this role through sheer luck, or if it was affected by my persistence and persuasiveness.

“When my father was injured during the war, he was lying in a hospital in Odessa. My mother and I went to visit him when a bomb suddenly exploded in front of us. Luckily, we both survived and did not suffer any injuries.

“Another lucky event was when we were supposed to be evacuated from Odessa on a ship, but we were late and missed it. The ship was bombed by German forces and no passengers survived. If we had not been lucky and made it to the ship on time, then we would’ve died. We left Odessa on the last ship with the last military troops, and there were many wounded soldiers with us. We arrived in Novorossiysk and had to catch a train to continue our evacuation. We were late for the train, and it got bombed. Everyone on board was killed. We took the next train.”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

“I wish for the world to always be peaceful. It is the most important thing to me. I also want people to be free, to be healthy, and to find their purpose in this world.”

- **This is what matters**

“A strong family. A mutual understanding between family members, love, and being surrounded by loved ones are the most important things that matter.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“I am very grateful of Jewish Family Service, and that they took the time to interview us and spend time with us. At my age, communication is very important, and I would like more programs like this where you can meet with other peers and spend some time together. I am very pleased with my life. I had a lovely family, a great job, and great parents. The only thing I would like to change is the life of my parents. Their lives were very difficult; my father died at the frontline, and my mother was left alone at the age of 32 and never got remarried. With my current wisdom, I would encourage my mother to get married. Instead, she devoted her entire life to me because I was very sick. She also helped me raise my son.”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Jacklyn Lewicki**



Jacklyn singing in Seaport Village, Winter 2019

***Jacklyn Lewicki, 85 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was five years old when the Germans invaded France. We fled from Paris and were on the road for more than a month. We were attacked by Italian planes and had to hide in the barns. The Italians were collaborating with the Nazis. By coincidence, I was reunited with my father in the Paris countryside who was on the road with his factory from Paris. Then my father left for Paris to get some food but was caught by the French Police and put in prison outside Paris in a jail called Drancy.

"My mother was told to put us in the care of an organization which was supposed to cooperate with the Germans for our safety and we spent months in two different schools which had been transformed into orphanages. One was Lamarck in Paris, and the other one was Guy Patin Street. (I have a remarkable memory of this, and it

Interviewed by Brae Canlen



was also repeated in the family). After hiding in those two different places in Paris, we ended up on a farm in Normandy where my sister, my brother, and I lived for more than one year. We didn't get enough to eat and became infested with lice. My mother was hidden in a tiny room by a French friend.

"One Sunday when parents came to visit us, the Gestapo came and arrested them. It was a horrible experience and I was about six years old. They dragged the parents and a pregnant woman who was put on a chair and taken to a truck waiting outside. As I came to learn the next week after we were sent away to the farm in Normandy, all the children left were sent to the concentration camps. I have the list of all the children who were there.

"The Red Cross sent us to Sweden to recover. Eventually, we were reunited with our mother in France where she worked in a clothing factory to support the family.

"Because of the war, I only had four years of formal education, from 8 to 12 years old, but I have taken numerous courses over the years and became an avid reader."

# 1. Looking at Myself.

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I can describe myself in three words: strong, smart, and curious."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"You have to live minute by minute. You can't make any plans because you don't know where you're going to go.

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I wish there were more people who were open to spending time with others who need help."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I blow up really fast and I do not have much patience; no one ever had time to listen or understand me. For example, I blow up at my sons just because they do not call me enough."



*Jacqueline Frenkel  
one year old*

- **This is what makes me happy**

“Everything is a lesson to learn, to make you stronger, to open you up to love, to clean your soul up for the next time you come around. That is what I understand.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

“There have been times when I wanted to kill myself, but the life of Elizabeth Kubler Ross was a model to me, and she was my model of strength and hope. She fought to survive. I am not afraid to die because the soul never dies. Besides her Ram Dass, who was a spiritual leader was my teacher too.”



*Jacqueline at five years old with her mother, sister, and brother.*

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“I need more support than I have. I need people I can talk to. I go to a lot of AA meetings. I don’t identify myself as an alcoholic. I go for the support. I’ve been connected to a few people that way.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“I stopped worrying a long, long time ago because what I worry about never happens and I cannot not spend time worrying about what I had no power over.”

- **Hopes for future generations**

“We don’t even know if the earth is going to be standing. Look at all the fires, the storms, the sickness. We are so vulnerable.”

### 3. Connections with Friends & Family

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

"I was very close to my mother, but during the war I was not able to be with her from five to nine years old. I was in two orphanages during the war. I never felt at home, even when I was married and lived in an apartment of my own. I always felt that I was living with the wrong family."



*Jaqueline and her 2 sons, Paul and Robert, at my younger son's wedding, 1990.*

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

"When I was 10 years old, I went to Sweden for six months. The Red Cross sent me to recover. It was a wonderful experience. I was taken care of by a family on a farm. A 15-year-old in the family named Maria took care of me. They gave their time and their love to a child they didn't know. In the year 2000 after 52 years, I went back to visit them and it was a wonderful experience."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a human being**

"I have had wonderful friends. I had a friend named Jackie that I recognized from a past life. We met on Yom Kippur outside a synagogue. She was wonderful and sweet, and she loved me unconditionally and I was lucky to have other friends who accepted me just the way I was, a little crazy-it was ME."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"Friendships come and go. They don't hold. You have to be ready to say goodbye to them. There's no such thing as gratitude. Nobody has had a pink life, but now I have found my friends from 20 years ago."

## 4. Connections with the World

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*Jacqueline on a retreat in Arizona.*

- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**  
“I try to socialize with my neighbors, but they want things from me. One was coming and crying all the time, but she was milking me. Everything I had she wanted. I just lost two friends because of this.”
- **This is what I have learned about community**  
“I’m looking for a group where I can discuss spirituality and the universe and love. Like Oprah.”
- **This is what I have learned about society**  
“I don’t fit in this society. I don’t fit in the synagogue. When people talk about their high school years and their families, I don’t fit in.”
- **This is what I have learned about the world**  
“Every generation feels that theirs was a terrible period. What happened in World War II, and the atrocities and the murders have been with me all my life, and are still with me, at every corner of my life. I lost my father there and my uncles, his brothers, my aunt Bella and my two cousins, which I remember just before the war at age four. My cousin Sarah was 14 and my cousin Max was 18 when they were murdered.”



## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“Life is a series of lessons. What do you do with what happens to you? Do you fall apart or not? I was 23 years old when I started going to therapy and I am still in therapy after 80 years to be able to live. When I was five years old, and for the next five years I felt like I had no voice because of the Holocaust. I felt like I didn’t exist. So now I am learning before I die.”



*Jacqueline as a baby nurse in Beverly Hills, CA 1990.*

- **This is what I care about**

“I care about people. And I believe in the Buddhist philosophy – don’t get attached. I don’t know much about love.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“I’ve been lucky all my life, but it has to do with synchronicity. Is this science? Everything I need or want, comes to me. I didn’t die in the war because I was lucky? Who know what luck means?”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

“I didn’t learn anything from the Holocaust but pain. I have nothing to pass on to future generations. You can’t teach survival.”

- **This is what matters**

“I’m learning every day and I’m excited about learning new stuff. I am really a scientist at heart.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“Life is made for learning. Once you’re closed to learning, you’re dead.”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Esther Lubomirsky**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in Kiev. My father had worked at the military plant and had to move to the east part of the country before Kiev was occupied by the German army. My family could not follow my father at that time. We joined him later, but our journey was very difficult and full of dangerous developments. I remember that I was sick, tired, and hungry during that time. "When we returned to Kiev in 1944, our apartment was occupied by another family and we had to live in the basement. After a few years, my father got a new apartment but since it was so far from our old one, I had to go to a different school."

Interviewed and translated by Jahanah Vinter

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**  
“I’m a strong person. I worked full time since graduating from college. When we moved to the U.S., I was 53 years old and wanted to keep working. I started to work at a nursing home, then I found a job at a retail store. I also went to college for 2 1/2 years. My work experience made me proud of myself. I am a person who likes to help other people, especially when somebody is facing hard times. I like to spend time with my friends. I’m always trying to organize some events that my friends can enjoy.”
- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**  
“I like to be independent and to plan my own day. I still drive my car, do my shopping, walk every day, and take care of my two dogs. They help keep me in good shape.”
- **This is what makes me sad**  
“I feel sad when people don’t enjoy their lives. It’s important to feel good and to appreciate what everyday life offers.”
- **This is what makes me angry**  
“I don’t get angry. I get sad or uncomfortable. I am trying to look at the world positively and find something good in difficult moments of my life.”
- **This is what makes me happy**  
“My family, my granddaughters, and my great-grandson. I also enjoy taking care of my two dogs.”

Asya - in school years

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**  
“I am trying to be an optimist and find comfort in walking in the fresh air. Usually, I solve my problems by myself, but sometimes I consult with my friends.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“I worry a lot when my family members are sick and if I do not feel good. I also get upset when I feel a lack of fairness.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“I want my children and grandchildren to be alright. I want them to be optimistic and that all their dreams will come true. I want them to be proud of their country and I want the USA to prosper.”

### 3. Connections with Others - Family & Friends

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*Asya with her friend Natasha*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“I knew my mother, father, and grandparents. My family was very nice and kind. I learned Hebrew from my grandparents. They were religious, kept the Kosher diet, celebrated Shabbat, and attended a Synagogue during Jewish holidays. Before the war, we lived in a communal apartment with two other families. My family consists of my mom, dad, brother, and myself. When the war started, my dad worked at a military factory. He moved to Novosibirsk along with the factory and equipment. We were told that we cannot leave with him and that they will give us separate transportation. We left when Kiev was bombed. When I was young, I remember a bright light, as my mother was holding me and my brother in her arms. We all were standing under a tree when a bomb blew up the tree above us, but we miraculously survived. Then we got in a train car which was used to transport cows and horses, and we went to Novosibirsk. It took us 2 months to get there. On our way, my brother and I got chickenpox. Upon arrival, my brother got pneumonia, and I got scarlet fever. That was my childhood. We hardly saw dad because he was not allowed to leave the factory. My mother used to walk several kilometers from Novosibirsk to the nearest village to exchange some of the stuff that we brought with us for groceries. We were settled in a private house, and the owners were very kind. They always treated us kindly and provided us with beds. Unfortunately, my brother got TB. He spent 5 years in a sanatorium, and mom visited him there. We left Novosibirsk, and he had to stay there. By the end of 1943, Kiev was liberated, and we returned home. Our apartment was occupied, and we were placed in the kitchen, where other tenants hung washed



clothes and cooked. My brother was still gone, and dad was at the factory all the time. Then the factory's officials gave dad a basement and construction materials. He built a room for us, and all the amenities were in the yard. We had wonderful neighbors there who were kind to us. My brother returned in 1945."

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

"When I got married, I had my own family. I always tried to have everything we needed, including material things as well as keeping peace and good relations with my family members. Everything worked out for me."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

"I had only one best friend in my entire life who was devoted to me. We understood each other perfectly and supported each other. Unfortunately, he died when we immigrated to the US."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"You must carefully select your friends to trust them. You have to stay as far away as possible from bad people. I do not have any friends at this time, I only have acquaintances."

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"Before the war, we lived in a communal apartment with two other families. We had one toilet and one bathroom for everyone's use and had to take turns. We all were friendly to each other and got along fine. When one family cooked a meal, they would share it with all of us. We trusted each other and we were good friends."

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"I am very grateful that I live in America and remember every day how good it is here. But the Motherland remains as my Motherland. I think about her, how she is there, and I worry about her. When I was in Kiev in 2006, my heart ached when I was leaving. I still have a girlfriend there who I went to school with. When I broke my arm, she visited me, washed my hair and braided it. I still remember all the nice people I have met in my life."



*Asya with her friend*

- **This is what I have learned about society**

"I lived in a wonderful society; I was lucky to have so many nice people in my life. When I was in school, I would get along with everyone. I liked all my workplaces and the people I worked with. They all helped me be successful in my career. I worked as an accountant in various factories. At the shoe factory, the chief accountant taught me everything and promoted me as to department manager. My team has always respected me. Then my neighbor helped me to get a job as an accountant in a garment factory where I got promoted as the chief accountant's assistant. People began to leave after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as it was close to Kiev. I thank God that no one was hurt in my family, but I knew families that were affected by the radiation. I could not get accepted to the Institute of Foreign Languages because of my nationality, and my son could not get accepted to the Polytechnic Institute in Kiev. But he was able to go to Leningrad after he applied at the last minute and got accepted to a college there. He met his wife there who was also a student at the same college."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"America is not the same as it used to be. Why is there no peace between Republicans and Democrats? The people do not understand who is right and who is to blame. Why is there such agitation? People here are so nice, they gave us everything, our neighbors give me rides anywhere for free. I know very little about my religion, I cannot read or speak Hebrew and I am not religious, but I attend Synagogue to remember my parents. But I was a member of the Pioneer Organization when I was young, and I was proud of it. I also remember the ceremony of raising the flag. Then we got accepted into the Komsomol, it was important to remember all the chief members of the Communist Party in the entire Soviet Union including all republics. We participated in Subotnick and went to collective farms to pick potatoes. We lived in public buildings, and we were all friends. And now everything that happens in America is not clear to me. It is so negative. What's happening in Ukraine is terrible."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

"Having good, trustworthy friends and also having living parents. Our children and grandchildren who are still growing up live well in this country. We have always been in a good relationship with our loved ones and friends and have never been left alone."



*Asya with her dogs  
Peanut and Butter*

- **This is what I care about**

“Someone else’s pain. I always sympathize with people who are sick and try to help them. I always try to be useful, and I am happy when I can be, and I feel much better. When someone asks me for help, I always try to help, it brings me pleasure and satisfaction.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“I believe in luck. I was lucky often in my life, even about small things. For example, a friend of mine took me to Costco during the holidays, and there were a lot of people and nowhere to park. Cars were lining up for the next open slot. We drove off to another part of the parking lot, and suddenly one car drove off and freed a space for us. And there are many such cases when I had unusual luck in my life. I was lucky with my husband, children, and my daughter-in-law. I was lucky when we were evacuating during the war. My mother, my brother, and I stood under a tree. A bomb hit the tree, and we miraculously survived. When we traveled on the train for several months, we were getting shot at a lot. There were cases when bullets hit the cars, and we were lucky to survive. I think God was merciful to me. My dad survived the war since he worked at a military factory.”

- **This is what I want to wish for future generations**

“The best. So that they achieve what they want in life and find their own path in life and that they have peace on earth, and they have a better fate than ours.”

- **This is what matters**

“Health is the most important thing. When you are healthy, you can dream about anything and achieve anything. The health of my children and grandchildren. At some point, my job mattered. I still remember it and call my former colleagues. I always remember that I was happy when I was working, I loved what I did, and I liked the team I worked with. I worked until the last day before I moved to the USA.”

- **This is what I think about life**

“I want life to be happy and everything that you have planned to come true. Life is good. Life is happiness. I am thankful for living in this world. Someone made sure to bring us here to fulfill our mission.”

# Life Lessons 2019

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## Name: Meri and Leonid Medvinsky



### Short Biography:

Meri is talking, and Leonid adds details: “I was born in 1927 in a small town of Belarus. I was two years old when my family moved to the city of Kharkov, which at that time was the capital of Ukraine. Our family, including my parents, my grandparents, and my sister lived in Kharkov until 1941. When the war started, we had to urgently evacuate. I was 13 years old and I remember well how difficult it was for us. We were in a freight car, it was stuffy, we were bombed...However, we were lucky. My aunt lived in Tashkent, where we were evacuated and stayed there until 1945. When the war ended, we returned to Kharkov. I began to study at the dental faculty of Kharkov Medical Institute, where I met my life companion, my Lenya. Our biographies are a bit similar. His family also moved to Kharkov when he was two years old. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, they had to evacuate. They ended up in Siberia where they experienced hunger and cold. A few years after they returned to Kharkov, Lenya got accepted to law school. One evening, my friends and I came to dance at his university. Lenya invited me to dance, and since then we have not parted. This year we will celebrate our 72-nd anniversary. We have two children, two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. We are proud of them.”



# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"We are very sociable. It is important for us to have people around who understand us. We really appreciate and love our family. We were devoted to our professions and believed that family, friends and professional growth are very important in life."



*Meri and Leonid*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"We've always read a lot and still do. We signed up for the library, and we believe that even at our age, it's possible to broaden our horizons. We are also confident that it helps to strengthen memory and the ability to reason. We do not exercise, but every day we walk around our complex."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"We are very sad and upset when our family members are sick. We keep up with the world news and worry about the unstable situation in the world."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I get very angry when Leonid does not do things the way I want. But in five minutes we sit together holding hands." Leonid: I get angry when I cannot do something right away but at the same time it's a great stimulus to do it."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"Children and grandchildren. Their success and health most of all. We are happy that we are together. We help and support each other."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"Family. We always discuss difficult situations in our life and make decisions together. We try to support each other with warm words and find the way to resolve the situation."

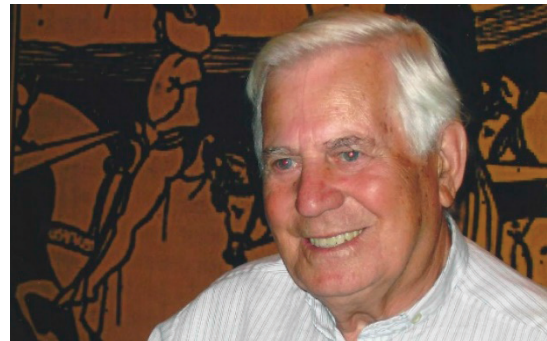


*Meri and Leonid*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**  
Meri: “It was easier to solve problems when we were young, strong and healthy.”  
Leonid: “It is easier now to solve problems since we became wiser.”
- **This is what makes me worry**  
“Family. We worry if someone is sick, if someone has an unpleasant situation and troubles.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“We do not want war to ever happen again. We hope that future generations will have strength to defend peace on our planet and live in peace.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Family & Friends

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*Leonid Medvinsky*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

Meri: “I was born on August 1st, 1927 in Chernova, Belarus. My mother was a member of the communist party since 1903, and my father was a labor worker. My sister is 9 years older than me. My paternal grandmother lived with us. She was deaf and mute. My father had 5 brothers and 4 sisters. One of his brothers moved to the USA. His sister lived in Moscow, and during World War II, she got evacuated to California. In October of 1941, we evacuated to Tashkent where my aunt lived. We got bombed during our trip. My father’s niece worked as a dean’s assistant at the medical institute in Tashkent. My aunt’s second daughter hosted us in her house; she was a teacher. My grandmother died in Tashkent. We stayed in Tashkent until 1944. My mother was sewing gloves for soldiers, and my father worked as a bricklayer. In 1944 we returned to Kharkov.

“Leonid was born in Persotin, Ukraine, in June 8th of 1927. His mother was a veterinarian, and his father was a labor worker. His aunt died and his parents adopted her son who was the same age as Leonid. He also had a sister. When Leonid was 5, his family moved to Kharkov. When the war started, he was 14, and they evacuated to Izhevsk (Siberia). Leonid worked on a farm and attended an evening school. In 1944 his entire family returned to Kharkov where he graduated

a military school. After that, he got accepted to a law school. He worked as a lawyer until he moved to the United States.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

Meri graduated school with a medal and got accepted to a Medical Institute. Meri married Leonid, and they had a daughter. Meri’s parents and mother-in-law lived with them. Her father died when he was 60 years old, and her mother died when she was 83 years old. Her mother-in-law died last. Her daughter went to a school that specialized in math. She met her husband there. Her daughter became a pediatrician. Now they all live in the United States. Meri has 2 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. The oldest grandson lives in Boston and has 3 children: 2 twin girls and 1 boy. Her granddaughter lives in San Diego and is a lawyer. She is married and has 2 sons; one is 5 years old, and the other is 2.5 years old.

Leonid and Meri met in 1944 and got married in 1948 in Kharkov. A year later, they had a daughter. His father died at the age of 56, and his mother died at age 86. His daughter got married early. His adoptive brother who was his cousin moved to Krasnoyarsk. His sister got married in 1943.

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

Before the war started Meri had two friends. One of them did not evacuate, and the other evacuated to Israel. Leonid was very communicative, and he always had many friends, especially in the military school.

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

Meri and Leonid had many friends. One family they were friends with moved to Boston. Right now, they are friends with their neighbors.

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

Meri: “I was always lucky with neighbors and friends because most of my neighbors were my friends.

Before the war started, all our friends were separated from us, and we were not close with our neighbors. When we emigrated to America, we always had many friends and neighbors. Right now, we are very friendly with our neighbors.”



*Meri Medvinsky*

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“Before the war started, some our neighbors did not treat us very well because we are Jews. After we emigrated, we did not feel like people were mistreating us. We traveled through Italy to the United States. We lived in Boston, and now we live in San Diego. Here we never witnessed people treating us bad because we are Jews.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“Both Leni and I had good careers when we lived in Kharkov. I worked as a deputy chief doctor of a large outpatient clinic and hospital, and Lenya worked as a lawyer. We worked for many years and everything was fine. When we arrived in Boston, we both were no longer working. Lenya was a member of Komsomol but did not join the communist party. I wanted to join the party. I already filled out an application for it, but Lenya did not allow me.

The American mentality is certainly different, and we have always felt it. Our daughter joined the society and blended in because she was younger when she arrived here along with our grandchildren. Our great-grandchildren speak only English. I really love America.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“There are many difficult situations in this world, and it is due to the fact that many countries are hostile to each other. I really dislike Putin; he reminds me of Stalin. He has been in power for 20 years and there is no such thing in any developed country. When we lived in Boston, we traveled a lot. We traveled all over Europe, but we just never visited South America. We were in Israel in 1992 when everything was starting to be developed. We were in Kibbutz. I believe that Israel is a wonderful country because there are a lot of qualified specialists, especially doctors. People even from America go to Israel for treatment. The situation over there is difficult right now because they are facing Arabs there. There are many emigrants in Israel from Russia, who are not only Jews.”

**Leonid died during the Life Lessons project.**



# Life Lessons-2019

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**Name: Adel Melnik**



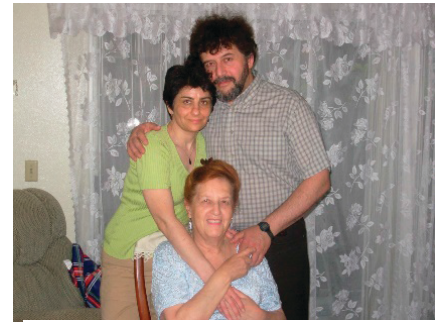
## Short Biography:

"I was born in the city of Kazan, Tatarstan, USSR in 1932. My father was pronounced 'An Enemy of the People' in 1936 and sentenced to 'ten years without the right to have mail from his family.' In the USSR that meant that he was killed. We left everything behind when my mother took my brother and I to Smolensky County. We stayed there with our relatives. My mother went to a different city to work as a teacher. We lived there for two years and moved to the city of Yaroslavl, where I attended elementary school. I was nine years old when WWII started. We evacuated to a village in Tombovsky County. In 1945 we returned to Yaroslavl, where I continued my education. In 1949 I graduated from school and was awarded a gold medal. I was accepted at the Leninsky Medical School. I graduated in 1955 with a Red Diploma as an eye doctor. I got married in 1955, my son was born in 1959 and my daughter was born in 1969. I have three grandchildren. I was working at the Novokuznetsky Hospital and at the Eye Center for 39 years as a Department Manager. When I turned 50 years old, I worked as an eye doctor there. All the members of my family immigrated to the U.S. in 1994. I retired before we moved to the U.S." \* Transliterating Russian, the soft consonants are marked with an apostrophe '.

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Adel with her son and daughter-in-law.*

- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I was always thinking negatively about myself since I had psychological trauma during my childhood. I always had to hide the fact that my father was named "An Enemy of the People" and killed. I felt like an outsider of our society. I never believed in myself and had low self-esteem. My children always say that I am smart but have low self-esteem. I have very devoted and caring children who consider me a kind, caring and loving mother. I am also a very devoted friend. I am not a jealous person and people treat me very well. I cannot complain. I am a very shy and modest person. I have never interfered in my children's lives, even when I thought that something was wrong."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I always do physical exercise in my bed in the morning. I am trying my best to be independent and not to have my children help me. I like to dress up, put on some makeup and jewelry, which significantly improves my mood."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I get sad when someone offends me, when my family members are sick, or something is wrong (in my opinion). But I do not say anything to them. For example: my granddaughter does not want to have children. I am very sad about it and think that it's wrong. Children are the most important part of a woman's life. But again, I would not say anything to her, since it's her life and her decision."

- **This is what makes me angry**

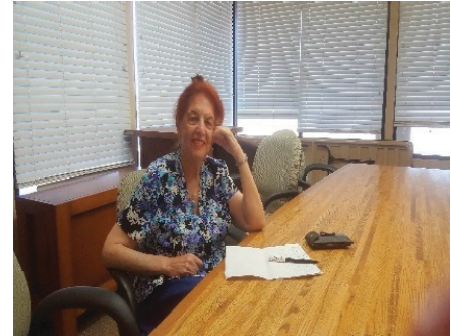
"I am trying my best not to pay attention to many things in life. I am trying not to react to people. I can be easily offended and angry when people lie to me. I am not friends with such people."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My children's and grandchildren's success and independence make me very happy! I enjoy our family gatherings and holidays very much. I am very happy to attend the ESL class and communicate with other seniors every week. I am happy when my health condition does not get worse and allows me to socialize with people. I love interesting books and shows."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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*Adel at the College Ave Center  
learning English language.*

- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

“The hope dies last. The strength that I have during difficult times is from the presence and help of my children. I have serious medical issues and I need to follow the doctors’ orders and do whatever it takes to stay independent as long as possible.”

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

“My love for my mother and the necessity to support her. Also, my love for my children and the necessity to serve them! I always had a very strong will to live and a constant desire to study and develop.”

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“My life in the country where I want to live, my wish not to disappoint my children, my huge desire to attend English classes and learn new things. My admiration and appreciation for the fact that most American doctors have positive attitudes and a desire to help the elderly, despite their age.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“Terrorists’ attacks, growing anti-Semitism, the well-being of Israel and the U.S., my family, the absence of great-grandchildren in my life.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“The well-being of the U.S. in the future. Health, happiness, and success of my family members. I hope to live long to be able to see the appearance of my great-grandchildren. But when the time comes for me to go, I hope that it will happen without suffering. As for future generations, I hope they will never know what war is and how to survive it.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friends & Family

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*Adel at social event*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“I had a very happy childhood until I was four and a half years old. My family was my mother, father, aunt and my oldest brother. My father was an engineer/chemist. My mother was a history teacher. My aunt was our housekeeper and a babysitter. My parents loved each other and their children very much and it was complete happiness. My parents were not religious. My grandfather was a religious Jew, who taught at the Jewish school.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“I became ‘a little old lady’ when my father was arrested. I was four and a half years old. I did not play with dolls and I knew that I must hide the truth about my father. It changed my life completely. All my life I hid everything and did not believe anyone.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“I was never open with people because I was scared that someone would ask me where my father was. I always tried to turn my back to my friends’ parents so they would not notice how my face was turning. I never had many friends.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

“I had just one best friend, but I had good relationships and good attitudes towards many people. I think that devotion is the best quality of my friends.”

### 4. Connections with the World

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*Adel with her daughter and son.*

- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“I communicate a lot with my Russian-speaking neighbors. They are very nice people. One of them is a



musician, another one is a former economist. I have one Jewish-American lady, she is a disabled person from childhood. She is highly educated and intelligent. I learned a lot from her.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“Our Russian/Jewish community consists of many intelligent, educated, Russian-speaking people. I attend the JFS events and holidays.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“I learned that the American society is very honest and it’s a great achievement of the U.S. There are many religious people, since all people have a freedom of choice. In my opinion, it’s a sin to be dishonest. Sometimes dishonesty can lead to crime. Understanding this concept prevents criminal situations. In Russia, our life was based on a lie. Many people did not believe in communism but had to worship it. “

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“The world is dangerous because there is a new kind of war called ‘terrorism’. It can appear anywhere and anytime. There are huge achievements of science, medicine, and technology. On one hand, it’s a hope for a better future; on other hand, it’s a danger of a nuclear war. Especially, there is an ecological danger for humanity.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Adel with her granddaughters.*

- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“My children and grandchildren’s success as well as my studies at the College Avenue Center.”

- **This is what I care about**

“I care about my children and grandchildren. Soon my granddaughter will study at the biology lab. I care about her since she can’t find a job as a biologist. She still works at a store.”

- **This is what I know to be true**

“My children do not lie to me. I trust JFS and know that they always help me if needed. My friends are truthful to me.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“If my children are successful, it’s luck for me! If Alina says that I am a good student at the ESL class, it’s luck! If I watch a good movie or a show, and if one day, I will have great-grandchildren, it will be my luck as well!”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

“They need to know the history of our life. They need to appreciate their life in the U.S. They need to have knowledge about WWII and make sure to live in peace. They need to look for and finally find a cure for cancer. They have to keep peace in Israel as well as keep Iran and Iraq under control. They should eliminate terrorism in the world.”

- **This is what matters**

“What matters for me is the health of my family members. Also, the prosperity of the U.S. matters a lot. The U.S. will always be the island of freedom for everyone.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“Life is difficult! You have to fight for it but at the same time life is beautiful!”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Boris Melnik**



## Short Biography

“I was born in the city of Chernigov, Ukraine in 1931. I finished second grade when WWII started. On July 9th, 1941, I was evacuated with my mother to Stalingrad, Russia. When the Germans got closer, my father joined us, and we evacuated to Central Asia near the city of Alma-Ata. My father left to the ‘Labor Front’. In 1943 we went to join my father in the city of Stalinsk, Novokuznetsk, in Siberia, where we lived until 1994. I graduated from school in 1949 and attended the Siberian Metallurgical Institute. I graduated in 1954 and started to work at the Novokuznetsky plant. In 1963 I was invited to work as a Project Manager. I got married in 1955 and had two children. My son was born in 1959 and my daughter in 1969. I have three granddaughters. In 1974 I started to work as an ecologist in Siberia and worked there for 40 years. In 1994 my wife, children, and grandchildren immigrated to the U.S. where I retired.”

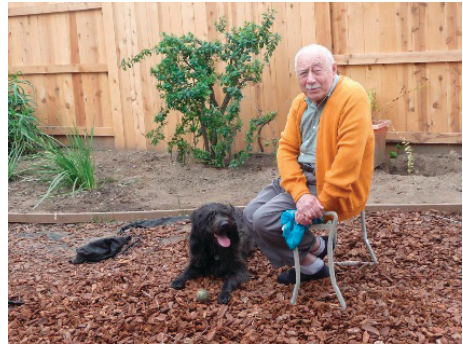
Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I learned about myself that I am never aggressive. I am an optimistic and a positive person who is always smiling and in a good mood. I was always a hard-working person and a team player. I am a very caring father and grandfather. My life is based on good relationships with people. I learned that being positive and optimistic is very beneficial since it provides no stress in my life. People and my family members treat me very well."



- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I always tried to be physically active by doing exercises, walking, and reading a lot to perfect my skills and abilities. I always tried to have a stress-free life."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I am sad when my family members are sick and if there are problems in this country. I am sad since I cannot help to fix the problems."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I am angry when people do not respect me and others. When people use and abuse me. I am sad when people gossip, fight, and are mean to each other."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"I am happy when my children and grandchildren are happy and successful. I love that they have a great, kind, and caring attitude towards me and their mother. I am happy that they respect, support, and care about each other. I am happy that all my family lives in the U.S, where my children and grandchildren are independent and successful. I am grateful to the U.S. that I am independent and self-sufficient as well."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"I always knew and was confident that I can do anything!"



*Boris with his granddaughters.*



- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**  
“Life is beautiful and everything that is destined to happen in person’s life will take place and that’s what gave me hope and strength to go forward.”
- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**  
“I know that everything will be all right since the worst is left behind. My family, my children, and grandchildren give me hope and strength. I am happy to see that they are very friendly and caring with each other and their parents.”
- **This is what makes me worry**  
“I worry about what is happening in the world, such as terrorism, Anti-Semitism and tension between the U.S. and Russia.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“I hope to stay healthy and live a long time in peace. I hope that my children and grandchildren will have a normal life. I also hope that war will never happen again.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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*Boris with his relatives.*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“I knew my mother, father, grandmother and grandfather. My family was very nice and kind. I learned Yiddish from my grandparents. They were religious and kept kosher, celebrated Shabbat and attended a synagogue during Jewish holidays.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“When I got married, I had my own family. I always tried to have everything we need, such as material things, as well as to have peace and a good attitude between my family members and I had it all.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

"I only had one best friend in my entire life who was devoted to me. We understood each other perfectly and supported each other. Unfortunately, he died when we immigrated to the U.S."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"You must carefully select your friends and trust them. You have to be as far as possible from bad people. I do not have any friends at this time. I only have acquaintances."

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"I usually greet them and help them, if needed. I had Russian-speaking neighbors/friends, who passed away. Since that time there are many new people in the neighborhood who I do not know."

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"All people and the management in our community are wonderful people. They helped me to sign up for the Cal-Fresh benefits. The JFS provides me with gifts and food packages for the Jewish holidays."

- **This is what I have learned about society**

"I attend the events and holidays at the JFS as well as my synagogue on a regular basis. I am not sure what to say about society. "

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"The world is crazy! People can't make peace with each other. Domestic terrorism is horrible. People are dying for no reason. It's a dangerous place to live in."



*Boris is celebrating Passover at the College Ave Center.*

# 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“The life is going on. I would like to live long to be able to help people and my family members. I would like to see them happy, healthy, and successful.”

- **This is what I care about**

“I care about law and order in the world.”

- **This is what I know to be true**

“I do not like when people lie to me and each other; be honest and treat others nicely!”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“Luck is when people are happy, and everything goes well for them. They are healthy, have jobs and success.”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

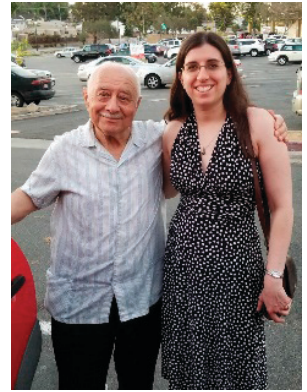
“They need to know that before it was a very difficult time. They need to appreciate what they have and the opportunity to achieve whatever they want. “

- **This is what matters**

“My family! I want them to be happy! The people in power should be honest, responsible, and take good care of us.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“Life is not that easy. You need to live your life to be in peace with yourself and others.”



*Boris with his granddaughter*

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Evelina Ochakovskaya**



## Short Biography

“I was born in 1932 in the city of Odessa, Ukraine. I was the third child in the family. When I was born, my oldest sister was 15 and my brother 13. When WWII started, I had just finished the 1st grade of elementary school and we evacuated to Central Asia, near the city of Dushanbe in 1941. All the time there I spent with my aunts. My mother was helping my oldest sister, since she had lost her newborn baby. We moved to the city of Tashkent in 1942 where I went to school. After that we moved to the city of Samarkand, where I finished the 4th grade. We returned to Odessa in January of 1946 in time for 5th grade. In 1948 I graduated from school and attended college. I graduated in 1952 and was sent to Belorussia, the city of Grodno, to work as a manager at the tobacco plant. I got married in 1955 and had my daughter in 1958. My son was born in 1965. I worked at the Food Institute until 1969 and after that I was working at the Computer Center for about 11 years. We immigrated to the USA in 1989. By that time, I was retired. I was married to my husband for 49 years until he passed away. “

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya



# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I am a wonderful mother and grandmother. I love all my children. I am very caring. I love to communicate with people, but I cannot forgive betrayal. I forgive people for their unkind jokes and their weaknesses. I am very independent and can do everything myself."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I did not take care of myself much. I was beautiful and had a beautiful skin. I always loved to have manicures and dress up. My husband took care of me by purchasing beautiful clothes for me and making surprises, like my birthday party with friends and cultural music/dance."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I am sad when my family members are sick or have problems. I am also sad that most of the time I am alone. My children take me to their place every weekend and I attend the CAC twice a week but still I feel lonely."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I get very angry when my children criticize me, especially when I put something on that they do not like or if I have some spots on my clothes that I do not see due to my impaired vision. I understand they are right, but I get angry anyway."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"I am happy when I feel good, when everything is ok in my family, when I see my children and grandchildren as well as when I attend the CAC program and communicate with other seniors. I am happy that my grandchildren are independent and successful in the US."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"My love towards my children and my husband.

My love to live. My love of my native city of Odessa and the Black Sea. The Black Sea was everything to me since I loved to swim and enjoyed it very much!"



*Lina at the College Ave center with her friends.*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"The hope for the best times. I was studying at the university and hoped to become an engineer, but it did not happen due to my family circumstances. Despite that I did not get a higher education, I still was successfully communicating with highly educated professionals, who were my friends."

- **This is what makes me worry**

"I worry about the relationships and attitude between our seniors at the College Ave Center, since sometimes people are mean to each other. I also worry about my children's' and grandchildren's' success. I also worry and want that there will be peace at all times."

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

"I hope that Jewish people will live in peace and Anti-Semitism disappears one day. I would like to live long to see the future of my youngest grandson. I hope we would never have war again and my family and future generations will have a quiet and decent life the US."

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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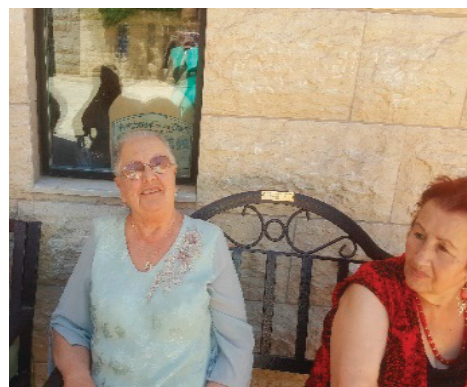
*Lina at the College Ave center learning English language.*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“My family was my mother, father, sister and brother. I was the youngest and everyone loved me. My family was not religious. My father was tall, dark and handsome, my mother was on a heavy side but very funny. My family loved music! Everyone loved to dance and sing. My four aunts were also on a heavy side, but I remember how they loved to dance.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“My father passed away at the military hospital in 1952. My mother was helping my oldest sister with three grandchildren. She also helped with my children when I was working.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“I studied at the women’s school and only had girls as friends. When I attended college, I was friends with boys as well. It was a great time.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“All my friends were so devoted to each other. We spent all the holidays together and supported each other. We could always count on our friends.”

### 4. Connections with the world

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**  
“I do not know my neighbors. They are all Americans and it’s hard for me to communicate with them in English.”



*Lina with her friends*

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“The community is wonderful. I am very grateful that I communicate with Russian-Jewish seniors. I am also grateful for the JFS, which helps me with financial assistance, gifts and food packages. I attend all the JFS events and holidays. “

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“The society where I am, I mean the seniors who I communicate with, is great! I do not know any other society. “

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“The world is different. It’s beautiful that we do not live in a war. The world for me consists of people around me. I do not understand politics and do not want to, since no one speaks the truth! I do not believe politicians. “

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“The meaning of life for me is the happiness and success of my children. I want to live long to see them healthy, happy and lucky.”

- **This is what I care about**

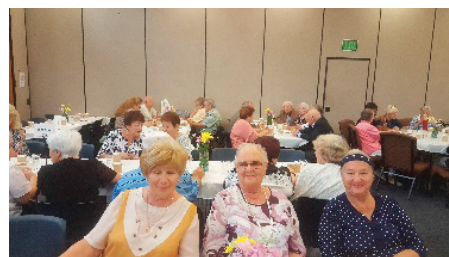
“I care about my health and the health of my family members as well as their success and wealth. “

- **This is what I know to be true**

“True is that the children are being born, they bring you happiness and joy! The true is that all people will eventually die.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“The luck for me now is different than when I was young. I needed a good luck at work, in the society, love of my husband and children. I wanted to be beautiful and well-dressed for them but now, it’s not that important. I need much less of luck now.”



*Lina is celebrating Passover with her friends at the College Ave Center.*



- **This is what I want future generations to know**  
“Now there are many more good people in the world than bad ones. Do not react to the bad ones, just walk away. Future generations should teach their children to be good, kind, respectful and honest people.”
- **This is what matters**  
“Health is very important. The relationship between my friends and relatives. “
- **This is what I have learned about life**  
“Life is good! We should enjoy our life. We have to always think positively! No negativity!”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Mira Parchuf**



## **Short Biography:**

“My whole life is connected to Leningrad. I was born, raised, studied, and worked in Leningrad. I mean Leningrad, not St. Petersburg. I survived the siege of Leningrad. I remember how I lived in Leningrad during the blockade, and I remember how hard it was to survive. My mother and I got two tiny pieces of bread for the entire day. The ‘bread’ was a mixture of bran and a little flour. My mother would make a soup from it, and I thought it was very tasty at that time. We burned furniture to boil water on a small stove in the living room. “When I was five years old, my mother surprised me with a small piece of sugar she received in exchange for my father’s suit. Mom and I tried to evacuate twice, but both attempts were unsuccessful. Once we tried to sail away in a boat, but two boats - one in front of us and the other behind us were blown up by German artillery. We were lucky to survive and return home”.

Interviewed and translated by Jahana Vinter

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I always liked my job as a cardiologist and wanted to continue working when we moved to the United States. When I was hired by the Newark Medical University, I was very happy."



*Mira when she was a student.*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"You need to stay positive to achieve your goals. When I could no longer work because of my health problems, I tried to occupy myself with something else. I began to give lectures and enjoy doing that to this day. I find interesting information on various topics and share it with my audience."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"It makes me sad when due to my health, I can't do what I planned to do. I don't like to change plans because of various circumstances."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I don't think I can get angry, but I can definitely be upset or disappointed when people try to take advantage of me."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My grandchildren, I am proud of them. I also love dogs. My daughter has two dogs and they often leave them with me, I like to walk with them."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult time**

"My family, my daughter, and my friends who helped me when my husband died."



*Mira in Hot Springs*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

“My friends from New Jersey give me hope and strength. When my husband passed away, they helped me with moving to a new place. They paid all my expenses and helped to pack my stuff because my arm was broken, and I couldn’t do anything. I keep in touch with them. I call them often.”

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“My daughter and my grandchildren.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“My health and my age make me worry. I hope when I will be in the hospital, they will be able to help me. The next election makes me worry. Our current president is helping Israel, and I really want him to be re-elected.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“I hope my grandchildren grow up independent, and that my daughter and her family will be fine.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Family & Friends

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“I was born in Leningrad in 1937. My mother worked as an accountant, and my father worked as an engineer. I was four years old when the war started. My dad was drafted to the frontlines. He got wounded and shell-shocked, and he did not make it to Berlin. My paternal grandmother and my aunt were buried alive in Vitebsk. My maternal grandmother, my uncles, and my aunts were evacuated to Vologda. My mom and I did not have time to evacuate and stayed in siege of Leningrad. There was a terrible hunger, my legs got weak, and I could not walk. I also had scurvy. My brother was born in 1946 after the war. I graduated from high school and then went to medical school.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“I got married when I was 25. I met my husband on the beach when I was on vacation. My husband had a master’s degree in engineering. After he was a soldier, he worked as a military engineer. He was lieutenant colonel, and he supervised the construction of bridges and tunnels. Our daughter was born in 1963. For 34 years, I



*Mira in her youth*



worked and taught at the Military Academy as a candidate of sciences and then as an assistant professor. My brother died early. My daughter got her education in the United States and got licensed as an accountant. I have one granddaughter and two grandsons. One of my grandsons graduated from Oxford University and is now studying at Duke University to get a master's degree. My other grandson is a master of wrestling. My husband died in 2002."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

"I had a lot of friends that I met at school and college. Many of them have already died and some live in other countries."

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"I have close friends in New Jersey. They helped me a lot when my husband passed away. They helped me move to San Diego. I call them often. I have many good friends in San Diego."

## 4. Connections with the World

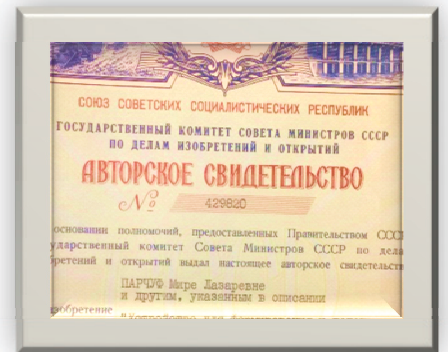
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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"In San Diego, I do not know my neighbors closely. When I lived in New Jersey, I had been friends with my neighbor, and I am still friends with her for 25 years. We call each other often. When I moved to San Diego, she helped me with the move. When I go to New Jersey, I stay at her place."

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"I was five years old during the blockade, and my mother and I lived in the center of Leningrad. The glass on the windows was broken from the bombing, so it was very cold. We covered the windows with blankets. My mom sold all our stuff to buy a potbelly stove, and we lived in a small room. We were terribly hungry, and there was almost nothing to eat. I could not walk from weakness. On my birthday, my mom exchanged my dad's suit for a piece of refined sugar. Lying in bed, I divided the sugar into grains and sprinkled them on the blanket. Then I licked the blanket for a month. I had an abscess, scurvy, and boils on my head from hunger. Our neighbor, who worked as a nurse in the hospital, sterilized scissors over the flame of the smoker because there was no electricity and opened the boils on my head. By spring, we were supposed to be evacuated in small tugboats. The boat in front of us and the boat from behind were hit by bombs. We had to return."



- **This is what I have learned about society**

"I went to school in Leningrad when I was 8. After graduation, I got accepted to a medical school and graduated with honors. At college, I was a member of the Student Scientific Society. I also worked at the Department of Forensic Medicine, I wrote articles and spoke at international conferences. You can find friends in any society. I lived in Leningrad for 55 years and did not want to move. I was engaged in scientific work and moved to the United States because of my daughter."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"The best thing in the world is stability. I am very worried when everything begins to change."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

"We must definitely continue to do something. Find a goal in life and stick to it. You have to keep yourself busy. I have to do something all the time: give lectures, learn new things, etc."



- **This is what I care about**

"I cannot see and hear injustice. It annoys me. I am starting to get angry and defend my case. And it always ends badly."

- **This is what I think about luck**

"When you are lucky it's good, when you are not, it's bad."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

"Young generation is not smarter; they simply have special narrow knowledge about their interests. They do not have wide outlook, but their knowledge about their subject matter is very large. My generation is way behind them in technology, so I do not know what to wish for them."

- **This is what matters**

"Restful life!"

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"No thoughts. I just want quietly live to older age and most importantly, without pain."

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Leonid Radomyshevsky**



***Leonid Radomyshevsky, 92 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1928 in Ukraine, in a city called Preluky. In June 1941 the war began, and we were forced to evacuate our city because of the Nazis. I fled with my mother and siblings to Kazakhstan and we were there until the war ended. She was very intuitive and followed her gut about what was to come. We suffered a lot and I was lucky to survive. After the war ended, I obtained my degree from the Polytechnical Institute and I became an engineer. I had many jobs in my lifetime such as running my own businesses and I have invented many things that I have patents for. I enjoy making homeopathic remedies from herbs and have cured myself and others from various ailments. The highlight of my life was when I married my lovely wife Raisa. We had two sons whom I am close to and I also have a grandson who lives with me."

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Leonid in his youth*

- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I am a person who needs to work and stay active. I am very creative, and I am a great organizer. I have had several successful businesses and I am a great inventor. I like to help people and have sponsored families from the former Soviet Union to immigrate to America. I have always been very social people as much as I can."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I love organic foods and homeopathic remedies. Throughout my life I have had various illnesses that western medicine alone was not able to cure. Therefore, I have used my own concoctions with herbs and organic products to cure myself. I have also helped cure other people. I am also a very positive and optimistic person which I believe also keeps me healthy."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I feel sad when I see anti-Semitism in American politics. I also feel sad when my son leaves because I get lonely. But what makes me the saddest is being without my wife who passed away over 10 years ago. She meant everything to me, and I miss her every day."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I strongly dislike liars and people who make promises and do not fulfill them. I do not like backstabbers and angry people. Otherwise, not much make me angry."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"Exercising and staying healthy makes me happy. I go for a walk every day. Making homemade remedies from herbs keeps me busy and happy. I also enjoy working on my patents. I love to listen to the operas and watch the news. I use a computer to stay connected to current events. But nothing made me happier than my wife, who passed away."



## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

“What gave me hope and strength during difficult times was being brave and my drive to be anything I wanted. I always believed that I would overcome any obstacle. I always had a positive attitude and I never gave up.”



*Leonid during the holidays with his wife Raisa*

- **This is what makes me worry**

“What makes me worry is the health of my loved ones. My two sons and grandson and granddaughter mean a lot to me. Their well-being is what matters the most to me. I also worry about my own health and I train my body to be as strong as it can.”

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“Exercise and staying active gives me hope today because then I am able to be as healthy as possible. I can train my body to be strong.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“I hope that my family members are successful and that my grandson successfully finishes college and then gets into a university for his masters. I hope my granddaughter gets accepted into UCLA. My hopes for myself are that my patents become reality and that the whole world benefits from them. I hope that there is no more war because I know how difficult it is when people suffer.”

## 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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*Leonid in Ukraine*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“My mom was born in 1899 (pre-Tsar) and she was a revolutionary. Her photograph is currently hanging in a museum in my birth town. She never had a formal education but after the revolution, she joined organizations which gave her an education. My

father was born in 1898 and when the revolution started, he joined the Red Army and he was also in charge of a unit during WWI. Both of my parents were very successful in their own ways.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“My mom was a homemaker and had three kids. She cooked wonderfully and was very generous. But she was also very strict. She taught us never to steal and to always be honest and work hard. I think of very pleasant thoughts about her.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“I always had good friends growing up. One of them named Gregory is still alive today and we still keep in touch. The other friend Alexander is also still alive and we also keep in touch. We met in our childhood and even though I had many friends, these two are the ones that I have kept a connection with over the years.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

“I have a friend in Hawaii and the two of us organized a “sister city” between San Diego and Vladivostok. We connected people to share business ideas and ventures. I still have important friendships as an adult.”

## 4. Connections with the World

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*Leonid and his beloved wife  
Raisa*

- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“Across the street from me live very lovely people. We always greet each other. They have a huge garden and share their fruits with me.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“I do not socialize with people within my community. It is too hard for me now that I no longer drive so as a result, I don’t get out much.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“People are all different and some get along and others do not. Politics has driven people apart more than ever; it has been very negative on society.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"The world is very volatile today. There are many regimes and terrorists wreaking havoc all around the world."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

"Creativity and inventions. To help others whenever I can. *Leonid with wife and son*  
My two sons who help me."

- **This is what I care about**

"I like honesty and when people are truthful."

- **This is what I think about luck**

"Luck is like fate. Some have luck and others don't. Luck is tied to God more than anything. During hard times I turned to God in prayer and they were answered."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

"During hard times people should turn to God and God will always help."

- **This is what matters**

"It matters that a person is honest and truthful. And to be kind to others and treat people well."

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"Life is a journey with many challenges that can be overcome."

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Valentina Rozenshteyn**



*Valentina at a social event*

***Valentina Rozenshteyn, 80 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1940 in Kiev, Ukraine. In 1941 my family and I were evacuated because of the Nazi invasion. Although I was just a baby/child during the war, I remember not having much to eat or any toys to play with. I had no clothes to wear during the freezing winters and not one doll to play with. I remember wanting a piece of rye bread to eat but there was nothing so that's the first thing I ate after the war ended. Kiev was freed in November 1943 and we were able to go back home. I finished my studies in literature and got a degree as a librarian. I got married and had a daughter and a son. I am very close to both of my children as well as my grandchildren. Eventually all of us moved to America and I worked as a librarian for many years."

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I have learned to keep the past behind me. I have accomplished everything that I wanted to in my life, particularly raising good children. Even though life was difficult, I managed to accomplish most things on my own with very little help."



*Valentina at her son's wedding*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I try not to get upset about things, but it is very hard when my feelings get hurt. I am trying to be less reactive today than when I was younger because it takes a toll on my nervous system. I know what sets me off and how to calm myself down."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"When someone I love has something bad happen to them. Getting older makes me sad because you are weaker and in poorer health, you are more helpless and cannot do what you used to do."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"Insensitive people make me angry; those who do not understand the needs and feelings of older people. Older people need special attention and understanding."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My children and grandchildren make me happy. They are all very successful and I am proud. I have a great support system. I enjoy going to events like concerts and shows. I love reading books and being on the computer."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"Hope always kept me going. I did not always achieve everything I set out to do, but I always had hope for the future. Some things passed me by, but I always assumed things would work out eventually."



*Valentina with her sisters*



- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**  
“My kids give me hope and strength today. If it were not for them, I would be alone because I don’t have many friends. They mean everything to me.”
- **This is what makes me worry**  
“I worry for my kids and their health. I want them to be well and to not have illness. I worry for the state of Israel because it has many enemies. My relatives live there, and I want peace.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“I hope that my friends and family are healthy and happy. I hope to have good health too.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person** *Valentina at her son's wedding*  
“My parents were friendly towards each other and always shared information with each other beyond just what happened at work. My parents spoke Yiddish and I understood some of it but when my mom said it wasn’t my business, I stayed out of it. My parents never made us feel bad and always trusted us. We were explained right from wrong and not just punished.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“I have learned the importance of explaining things to children when they do something wrong so they understand versus scaring them into listening by asserting your power over them.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“In the Soviet Union I was respected by my friends because I respected people regardless of how I actually felt about them. My mom said, ‘Respect the person despite who they are.’ I was usually the youngest at work and always treated well because I never bothered anyone.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

“It was pointed out to me that I am perceived to be naïve. I don’t agree with that assessment. During conflict there is always different sides to a story. I always try to find out my fault in a situation so that I understand my role in it.”

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“All people are different and act according to those they are around. Sometimes I have trouble interacting with people. I need to know exactly who I’m dealing with.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“I don’t feel a sense of community. I meet with a few people to gossip but otherwise I don’t socialize within my community. I am most social in a classroom setting.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“I think people are different and as long as they treat me well, I am kind back to them. If I’m shown respect within society, I am respectful back.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“The world is very unjust, especially for Jews and Israel. Being different makes you a target. People are often misunderstood.”



*Valentina on vacation with her family*

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“My kids bring my life meaning. They are educated, smart, kind, and bring me joy. I feel like the way I raised them shows in how well they treat me.”



*Valentina out to lunch*

- **This is what I care about**  
 “I care about how Jews and Israel get treated in the news because it’s usually unfair.”
- **This is what I think about luck**  
 “Luck depends on the individual person and how they find their place in life and set themselves up. It also has to do with the personality of the person as well. Sometimes, though, a smart enough person can feel things out and do what is needed to be successful in life.”
- **This is what I want future generations to know**  
 “Nothing is more important than peace. Diplomacy to prevent war.”
- **This is what matters**  
 “Good health and my kids.”
- **This is what I have learned about life**  
 “Everything was a lie.” Leo Tolstoy. “When you get older you realize that nothing was true or necessary.”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Bella Shteynberg**



*Bella at a social event*

***Bella Shteynberg, 82 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in 1938 in Ukraine. In June 1941 my family and I were evacuated, and we suffered a lot during that time. What stands out most about the war was being three years old and the bombings and not having anything to eat. I will never forget when a soldier gave me a piece of sugar to eat before we were evacuated. Luckily, we survived the war and returned to our city. I was able to complete my degree and became an optometrist. Eventually, I got married and we had a daughter and son. I have several grandchildren. I have been blessed with a wonderful family.”

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I feel blessed because I had a wonderful husband. We were together for almost 62 years. I have wonderful kids and grandchildren who help me a lot. They are all successful and this brings me great joy."



*Bella with daughter Marina*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I take care of myself so that I do not burden my family. I do whatever I can to stay independent. Luckily, I have children that help me when I need something. They visit me often."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"My illness makes me sad, but I try to keep it together. When my kids are sick, I am the most worried and upset. Otherwise, I am a very happy person."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I get upset when people lie to me, but I rarely let things bother me."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"I am happy when my children and grandchildren experience good health and success. I also like poetry and know many poems by heart."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"What gave me hope and strength during difficult times was being an optimistic person. I always tried to handle my struggles as best I could."



*Bella with husband Yakov*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"What gave me hope in the past was knowing that the future would be better. You need to believe that things will turn out well in order to live a good life."



- **This is what makes me worry**  
“I worry about the health and the well-being of my family and friends.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“I wish that my family and friends have good health and success and happiness. I hope for peace for future generations.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“I was the oldest in my family and always helped my siblings and my mom. From a young age I tried to be as helpful as possible. At 15 years old I had to live with my aunt and that was hard for me, but I continued to be helpful to my relatives. I always had friends but was too busy to spend time with them.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“I learned that having close friends is so important but not more than having close family. My friends are supportive, but my family always supports and encourages me; especially during difficult times.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“I used to gather with a group of friends, and we would take excursions to Mexico and play bingo and dominos. We shared joy, laughs, stories, memories. Today friends are older and live far away and some passed away. It is hard to keep in touch.”



*Bella working as optometrist.*

### 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**  
“I have very nice neighbors, but I don’t socialize that much anymore. We all get along and I will always help out if needed.”



*Bella and her beloved husband*

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"My community is a very good community. People are very helpful. I am very close to the Jewish community."

- **This is what I have learned about society**

"People are people. If you treat people well, they respect you and treat you well in return."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"The world is big, and people are all different and I enjoy learning about people through the computer and television."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

"You only have one life and need to live in a way that makes you proud. Be kind, honest, loving and grateful."

- **This is what I care about**

"I care about my children and my relationships with them. I want them to be well and loved. I want to be there for sick people and be a good friend."

- **This is what I think about luck**

"Luck is something you need to believe in. If you believe it, you will experience good things."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

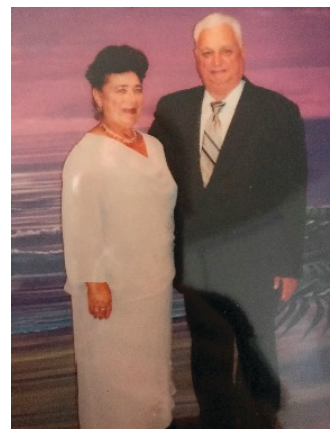
"That this is a great country and to make sure they keep society great."

- **This is what matters**

"What we say, what we think, how we live. How we raise our kids. Everything has meaning. What you put out; you get back."

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"Live so you have no regrets in life."



*Bella on a cruise with Yakov*

# Life Lessons – 2019

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**Name: Sonya Shuklaper**



*Sonya with her husband after the wedding.*

## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in 1928 in Kiev, Ukraine. I was 13 years old when WWII started. My father left to fight the Germans right away. I was evacuated with my mother and siblings to Chelyabinsk in September 1941. In 1946 my family returned to Kiev and I found a job as a secretary. I got married in 1951 and had a son and a daughter. I was working as an accountant at the factory but soon after I graduated from college, I was promoted to a Senior Accountant. In 1989 all my family immigrated to the U.S. where I started to work as a cleaning lady and a pastry chef.”

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I learned that I am very kind, intelligent, and soft-spoken. I love people, and especially my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I learned that being nice and kind helps me to communicate with many people and our friendship lasts a lifetime. All the members of my family are very loving, caring and always paying so much attention to me. "



*Sonya in her youth.*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I never took a good care of myself since I was a main caretaker of my family. Now, I love to dress up, love to go shopping and buy things for myself. It makes me feel good and lifts up my spirit and mood. I love when my home is nice and clean."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I am sad when people gossip and are mean to each other."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I get angry when people criticize their life in the U.S. We never worked here, but get everything we need, such as financial assistance, medical care, transportation service, etc.

We all should be very appreciative of what we have."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My family makes me so happy! I am also happy that despite my age, I can get a cup of tea by myself, attend ESL classes, communicate with other seniors and observe how my great-grandchildren grow and develop."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"I was always an optimist! During difficult times I always said to myself, 'Sonya, you have to be very patient and everything



*Sonya with her family.*

will be all right!’ I was never jealous of people, I tried not to argue. I think that to be an optimist is very important!”

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

“My optimism! During World War II, I was hungry but always thought and hoped that the difficult time will pass, and everything will be back to normal.”

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“My children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. They are all my life! I am very grateful to Jewish Family Service that I am independent!”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“I only want my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to be healthy! My great-grandson suffers from asthma; he coughs a lot. I hope that he will outgrow this terrible disease.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“I hope war will never happen again! I want all people to live in peace! I hope that my youngest granddaughter will get married and be happy! My children and grandchildren take good care of me and show lots of attention. For myself, I would like to live long to see my children and grandchildren and observe how my great-grandchildren grow and develop.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“My father was very handsome and smart. He hated Stalin and the communist regime. My mother was very kind, cute, and hard-working. She was a good cook and a baker. My sister was a very good person and hard-working as well. My brother was also handsome and smart. My family was not religious.”



*Sonya with her husband.*



- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“My father was killed in the first days of war. My mother always helped to take care of my son when I was working. She always helped and supported me. My husband was a very good person and a caring father.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“In the area where we lived there were only boys around, but I had a girl as a friend at school. I attended the Ukrainian school, was growing up among Jewish and Russian children and, fortunately, did not feel any anti-Semitism.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

“As an adult I realized that there are many Russian people who are very jealous and trying to do bad things to others. I was friends mostly with Jewish women, but I had just one best friend. I also had some acquaintances at work.”

## 4. Connections with the world

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“I do not communicate with my neighbors. Most of them are Spanish-speaking people and I do not speak Spanish.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“I am a client of JFS and thank you very much for all you have done and still do for me! I appreciate everything a lot. I love you all very much! You helped me and still do a lot for me. I am very happy to be a part of the JFS.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“I love the U.S. Unfortunately, I do not know much about society since I do not communicate with the American people. Thank you, U.S., for everything! People smile and are very nice to you everywhere.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“There is a war in many regions, such as Spain, Ukraine, Syria. I want the youth to live in peace. I do not want them to know what war is.”



*Sonya with her granddaughter's mother-in-law.*

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Sonya with her daughter and granddaughters.*

- **This is what gives my life meaning**  
“My children, grandchildren, and friends!”
- **This is what I care about**  
“I want peace on earth for everyone! I care the most about my family members and friends.”
- **This is what I know to be true**  
“Do not lie to people. I do not like arrogant and dishonest people. Treat others like you want to be treated!”
- **This is what I think about luck**  
“My children and grandchildren work and live in the U.S. They are healthy and happy. I live for them. We are all lucky to be here!”
- **This is what I want future generations to know**  
“They need to be the best they can be! They need to be nice and kind to each other. They need to preserve peace! Everyone will be happy, if they live in peace.”
- **This is what matters**  
“Different things matter for different people. As for me, at my age of 91, it’s my health, my relatives, and friends.”
- **This is what I have learned about life**  
“Life is difficult, but I live happily because of my family and devoted friends. The most important thing is PEACE on earth!”

# Life Lessons -2019

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**Name: Gerald Szames**



*Gerald in San Diego, age 83*

## **Short Biography:**

"I was about two years old when the Russians invaded Eastern Poland in 1939. My father, along with all the other able-bodied men, was rounded up by the Russians and placed in a train sent towards the invading German army so the Russians could get extra time to retreat. We never saw them again. My mother, brother, sister, and I were moved into a Jewish ghetto at the edge of town. We escaped into the woods where we met my grandfather and other family members. We hid there for almost three years, moving to a new place every two weeks. The Russians liberated us in 1945. My grandfather's brother in Columbus, Ohio helped reunite my family in the U.S.

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

I enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> grade at the age of 11. I remember I could not get my knees under the table. I met my future wife, Eva, while I was working in my parents' produce stand. As a child, Eva had been living in Budapest when the war broke out. She was saved from the Nazis by a Swedish diplomat named Raoul Wallenberg. Eva and I married in 1959 and raised three daughters together. I worked as a pharmacist for 42 years before retiring in 2004."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"My whole life, I've looked up to my older brother. He was always much better than me. But that's something that's hard to overcome."

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"My mom always said that you can't depend on anyone else. There is a Yiddish expression she always used: "Mir miz zich rativin." It means, "We must save ourselves."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"Every time I think of my mother, I cry."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"When my kids were little and they cried, it always made me angry. I don't know why. Probably because I cried."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"My grandchildren. Seeing them, talking to them, brings me fulfillment."



*Gerald with his late wife Eva*

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"Every Friday night my mother would say, 'We will do better next week.'"



*Gerald in the middle, with his sister and cousin before the war*



- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**

“I think of my mother. No matter how things are, I know it’s going to get better. It’s the feeling I always got from her that things are going to turn out O.K.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

“I have this memory of having to walk to the bathroom with my wife Eva, who has [advanced] dementia, and I was hurrying her along. It took me back to the ghetto, where you couldn’t dillydally when you were walking in line. You could get shot for that. And I think about whether I could take care of Eva in this situation, the way my mother took care of me. You can’t know what you would do. Run? Hide? Leave her behind?”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

“There is hate for the Jews now. It’s an easy thing to do, to hate the Jews. ‘Dirty Jew’ – *Zyd* in Polish – has always been around. Hope that changes in the future.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friends & Family

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*Gerald and his wife Eva*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**

“When we were hiding in the woods during the war, we were never alone. My grandfather was our leader. My uncle and older brother helped. There were five kids. I don’t understand how they were able to do it, keeping five kids ages 5 to 10 from running around and making noise.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

“I think my daughters are happier than their parents were. They come over and talk about the restaurants they go to, things that we never did. They spend their money on their children in ways that I didn’t.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

“I didn’t have many friends because I was always helping my mom after school, selling fruits and vegetables. Everything happened on a Saturday or on the weekend but those were workdays for me.”



- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

"I've tried to participate in support groups but it's difficult. I get a feeling of tightness around my head. When someone is having problems, I'd like to give them solutions. But you're not supposed to do that. You're supposed to just listen."

## 4. Connections with the World

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*Gerald (middle) with his Mother and siblings*

- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

"I've lived here for 33 years and the neighborhood used to be more congenial. Every year on July 4, we would have an outdoor party where everyone would bring something. We had a Neighborhood Watch captain, but he died. Many of my neighbors have died. I don't know too many people around here anymore. I'm too busy taking care of my wife."

- **This is what I have learned about community**

"I once belonged to the Friendship Club, where 12 couples got together every month at a different house. But now there are only three guys left. Sometimes I would try to talk to people about what they did during the war and they didn't want to talk about it. Conversations were more superficial."

- **This is what I have learned about society**

"I try to be aware, be careful, and try to figure out if they have any trouble with me being a Jew. Most people don't care. But in some cases, people wear it on their sleeve. It's not about drawing boundaries with me. It's about being safe."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

"The fate of the Jewish people is tied to the fate of Israel. One will not stay alive without the other. Attacks on the Jews have never really stopped. It's easy to demonize Jews because they're industrious, they have to be in order to survive. I don't think that's ever changed and I don't think it ever will change."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Gerald with his wife and 3 daughters*

- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“My mom’s words: The kids are your gifts. She lost everything [in the Holocaust] but God gave her the gifts of her children.”

- **This is what I care about**

“The health of my children and grandchildren. What else is there? Whether or not you have a swimming pool? When my kids ask me what I want for my birthday, I tell them a Cadillac. I know they can’t buy me a Cadillac, but I know I can keep myself healthy.”

- **This is what I think about luck**

“One word for luck in Yiddish is *glick*. My mother considered me *glick* because of an incident that happened in the ghetto. She believed that we survived because of me.”

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

“Take care of your health, and the consequences of it. If you’re driven by fear, the results aren’t always good. You always have fears, but you can’t succumb to them.”

- **This is what I have learned about life**

“You can wait for others to do things for you or you can do things for yourself. You’re better off doing things for yourself.”

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Aleksandr Usach**



## Short Biography:

“I was born in Vinnitsa, a small town in Ukraine. The war started when I was nine years old. My sister, my parents, and I evacuated to the Krasnodar Territory in Russia and stayed there until the end of the war. It was a difficult time. We returned to Vinnitsa in 1944. I really wanted to study and got accepted to the financial college in Odessa. We were very poor, and no one helped me. I survived on matzo and eggs. In 1970, I met my future wife, Zhenya. We got married in 1971, and in 1985 we emigrated to the United States. We have two daughters and two granddaughters. We are very glad that we live in this country.”

Interviewed and translated by Jahana Vinter

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

“All my life I only counted on myself and used to make independent decisions. I always believed that everyone should have a hobby and was very fond of fishing and photography.”



- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

“I always loved reading and thought that it was necessary to maintain my intellect. I do not really like to play sports, but I loved to swim when I was young. I love fishing. Even here in San Diego I went fishing with my wife. My wife and I liked when we went on all kinds of excursions and cruises.”

- **This is what makes me sad**

“It frustrates me when people act unfairly. It makes me sad when people I am close with have problems.”

- **This is what makes me happy**

“Children, grandchildren, their successes and our communication with each other. Fishing gave me great pleasure in the past, but now, due to my health issues, I no longer fish.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times.**

**As Aleksandr Usach died during the Life Lessons project, his wife lovingly chose to share her recollections and answered for him.**

“He loved life very much, he loved his family, and he wanted to live. His family gave him hope and strength. Thanks to them, he lived, he wanted to see everyone, and he loved everyone.”



*Aleksandr-when  
he was young.*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

His wife Evgenia: “His parents supported him when he was young. When his father was at the frontline, his mother, the grandmother, and his sister evacuated. Thanks to them, he was able to survive those difficult times.”

- **This is what makes me worry**

His wife Evgenia: “In recent years, he was worried that he had stopped driving. He was worried about the loss of loved ones, his parents and his sister. Over the past six years, he has developed vocal cord cancer. His vocal cords were removed, and it was very difficult for him because he could not talk. Then they made a small prosthesis, and he could talk a little. In addition, he had bad hearing and wore hearing aids. When we would visit our daughter, he did not hear what they were saying. He only could hear when someone speaks and look into his eyes. Therefore, it was difficult for him to be around other people. He suffered for six years. He loved to watch TV, and it was easier for him to hear and understand his favorite shows.”

- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**

His wife Evgenia: “He wanted to see his granddaughters grown and successful.”

### 3. Connections with Others - Family & Friends

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*Evgenia and Aleksandr*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person.**

His wife Evgenia: “He lived with his parents, his sister, and his grandmother before the war. His dad was at the frontlines, and Aleksandr emigrated to the Krasnodar Territory in Russia with his mother, his sister, and his grandmother. During the war, he worked at a factory when he was only 10 years old. He received a card for bread, and this helped his family. His mother also worked, and they would get two cards for the entire family.”

- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**

His wife Evgenia: “After the war, Aleksandr graduated from high school in Vinnitsa, served the army and got accepted to the Credit and Economic Institute in Odessa. His major was planning economics. The college years were not easy since his parents could not help him with money because they were very poor. His mom could only bake something and send to it him, but they did not have money. The student stipend was also very scanty.”



“He met with me when he was 36, and I was 24. After he graduated college, Aleksandr worked for several years at a shipping company as the head of the department. Then he moved to a transportation trust where roads were repaired. When he transferred to management at the regional executive committee, his boss wanted to get rid of him in order to promote his girlfriend to his position. This incident affected him so much that he had a minor stroke, and he developed a heart disease.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**

His wife Evgenia: “His classmate, Gregory, had the same last name of Usach, but they were not relatives. Their fathers had the same name of David Isakovish. Aleksandr and Gregory became friends for life. Gregory became a writer for children. He has written many books and plays. His plays are still staged at the Vinnitsa Theater of Young Spectators. He lives in Israel now. He gifted us many of his books. Although they lived far from each other, they kept in touch all the time. Another friend named Zinovy Usach lived in the same neighborhood. He was a distant relative of Gregory. They all were friends together; they would visit us in Odessa to vacation at the sea. Zinovy died, but I still communicate with his daughter, Zinaida, on Skype. She lives in Vinnitsa, and she takes care of all graveyards of our relatives.”

- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**

His wife Evgenia: “We were friends with the same family for many years. We had met them in Vinnitsa. They live in New York now. The head of the family has already died. He was a teacher of literature, and his wife worked at the project institute.”

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

His wife Evgenia: “Aleksandr was friendly and was always in good relationship with everyone. He never offended anyone. He was not petty and never scolded anyone. He liked to say nice things and cheer up other people. He was very optimistic.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

His wife Evgenia: “He was a member of Komsomol, but he was not a member of the Communist party. He wanted to join the party, but he was not allowed.”



*Aleksandr with his friend*

- **This is what I have learned about society**

His wife Evgenia: "He liked society in America. People here always want to help, and they are always sympathetic. He was very pleased when he moved to the USA. He had charisma, and people always treated him well. He was respected everywhere, both in Odessa and here."

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

His wife Evgenia: "He was always interested in politics; he knew everything, and he could explain it well. No one was anti-Semitic to him. He was a good man, and he was friendly. Nobody treated him badly. He suffered a lot in the last six years."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

His wife Evgenia: "The most important thing was his family and his loved ones. His career mattered when he was younger."

- **This is what I care about**

His wife Evgenia: "He was interested in politics. He loved fishing, and it was always important to him. He cared about his family and friends."

- **This is what I think about luck**

His wife Evgenia: "He got his job, his wife, and his surroundings due to luck. It was lucky that him and his family survived the war. His father returned from the war and could live his life. Aleksandr had a successful heart surgery. After that, he began to feel much better."

- **This is what matters**

His wife Evgenia: "His health and family. Even little things matter. For example, waking up in the morning and seeing the sun matters."

- **This is what I think about life**

His wife Evgenia: "When he was younger and worked, he had different interests than when he retired. He used to care about his business, but when he retired, his interests shifted too. He suffered a lot when he lost his voice. He loved to talk and tell stories. He had a good memory. He remembered all the actors from the movies he watched and all the books he had read; he loved to talk about those things. It was traumatic for him when he lost his voice. He also had other health problems like difficulty breathing. He had a heart problem and high blood pressure when he was younger."

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Mikhail Verkhivker**



## Short Biography:

“I was 12 years old when German troops occupied Odessa. My parents and I had to urgently evacuate. We were able to catch the train that was going to Lugansk. Soon we left Ukraine and went to Frunze, in the Kyrgyz Republic. Our family moved again when my father was working near Sverdlovsk. We returned to Odessa in 1945. I graduated high school with honors and went to college. After graduation, I was offered a job on Sakhalin Island, where I worked for three years. I got married and my son was born a year later. When I returned to Odessa, I worked at the Central Design Bureau for 35 years and received my master’s degree during that time.”

Interviewed and translated Jahana Vinter

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I'm a hard worker and love to learn new things. My life wasn't always easy, but I'm proud that I took a good care of my family. I loved my job and was able to work on my degree while I worked full-time."



*Resting*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"My life has changed since my wife died a few years ago. I was feeling lonely until I met new friends. My son spends time with me on the weekends. My grandson lives in Washington D.C., and I enjoy spending time with him when he comes for a visit."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"Time goes by too quickly, especially when you are getting older. I try to concentrate on things that make me happy."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I can get disappointed when something goes wrong, but I don't think I feel angry about things that I can't change."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"There are plenty of things to enjoy and to be thankful for. I love spending time with my son and my grandson. I enjoy reading and learning something new is always a good thing. I like to spend time with my friends as well."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"My son and my daughter-in-law. My friend Mira also greatly supports me since my wife died."

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**

"My family and my best friend from college who lives in Australia."



*Michail at social event*

- **This is what gives me hope and strength now**  
“I have a small family: my son, my daughter-in-law, and my grandson.”
- **This is what makes me worry**  
“My health and my age.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“The future of my grandson. Maintaining my health and a healthy relationship with my family.”

### 3. Connections with Others - Family & Friends

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*Michail and his friend Mira*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“I had a small family, only me and my parents. We evacuated from Odessa when the war started, and I was 12 years old.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“My wife and I had one child, my son. My wife died, and I miss her very much. My son and my daughter-in-law visit me sometimes. My grandson is also married.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“I had many friends when I was at college. Many have already died. My best friend lives in Australia.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“Many of my friends are gone. Now I visit the daycare center for the elderly three times a week, and I have new friends here. I also have a good relationship with my son and his family.”



## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“Before the war, my family lived in a communal apartment. In our apartment lived three Jewish and one Russian family. During the war, all the Jewish families emigrated. And the owner from the fourth family became a policeman and began to serve the German invaders.”

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“Due to the French intervention in Odessa in 1919, all women were referred to as ‘Madame’ for a long time.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“There has been a lot of injustice in my life towards me and my family. It was difficult for my son to go to college. I could not defend my dissertation the first time because I was a Jew.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“May there be peace, as the song says! And as they said in Russia, ‘So that there is no war’. This was said by people who went through the war. I personally did not fight, but I survived the war as a child.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“My family, my friends, and that I am still alive and can enjoy a walk on a sunny day. At my age, my health is important.”

- **This is what I care about**

“I respond to indifference with indifference. If someone responds to my presence and my activity, then I respond. And if they do not care, then I do not care either. That’s all.”



*Michail and his friends*

- **This is what I think about luck**

"I am lucky that I live in America, lucky that my children are nearby, lucky that I live in this world and is still alive. I was lucky that my parents and I were able to survive the war and return to Odessa."

- **This is what I want future generations to know**

"That there was no war! And to always have a peaceful sky above your head."

- **This is what matters**

"What matters is life and communication with people. It matters that I go to a daycare for elderly people and chat with friends."

- **This is what I have learned about life**

"With God's help to live more parts of my life. My wife has been gone for four years, but I am still living and am grateful for every day. Cheers to life and may it last as long as possible. I adore the area where I live and have lived here for 20 years. Today I walked along our street, there were beautiful houses everywhere, and the sun was shining. And I want to live more and more."

# Life Lessons 2019

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**Name: Elizaveta Yampolsky**



*Elizaveta at her home*

***Elizaveta Yampolsky, 82 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in 1938 in Kiev, Ukraine. In 1941 the war started, and we fled to Siberia. We suffered a lot during the war and were lucky to survive. I had typhoid and was very ill. After the war ended in 1945, we returned to our city. I eventually finished tenth grade and received a diploma, but I didn’t study further because I had to go straight to work. I later worked in a dry-cleaning factory and eventually I got married and we had two sons. I now have four grandchildren and each one is successful.”

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **This is what I have learned about myself**

"I am an optimist. I have a good sense of humor. I do not like to complain. I always see the positive, even when something bothers me. I treasure my family. I like my freedom and I am independent."



*Elizaveta with her grandsons*

- **This is what I learned about taking care of myself**

"I am very independent and try to take care of myself as much as I can. I take walks in the mornings and I take vitamins to stay healthy. I have a few close friends that I can call anytime as well."

- **This is what makes me sad**

"I get very sad when my children or grandchildren are sick. I do not like to sit home alone all day. I need to keep busy."

- **This is what makes me angry**

"I do not like gossip. I dislike those that lie and are jealous. I am superstitious. Overall, I am a calm person and it takes a lot to get me angry."

- **This is what makes me happy**

"When my children and grandchildren come to visit me. I enjoy watching my grandson's hockey games and my granddaughter's gymnastics and dance. I am social and active and enjoy going to the casino as well as museums."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **This is what gave me hope and strength during the difficult times**

"My children and grandchildren give me strength when I am not doing well. They lift me up and never let me down."



*Elizaveta with her sisters*

- **This is what has given me hope and strength in the past**  
“I would often find hope in books that I read and I always distracted myself with movies and theatre as it was an escape. My parents and friends always lifted me up.”
- **This is what makes me worry**  
“I worry about my family and their health. When my friends are in need I also worry.”
- **Hope and strength today**  
“My ability to keep calm brings me hope and I feel peace when those I love are well.”
- **Hopes for myself, my family and friends and future generations**  
“I wish peace on earth. And for my family and friends to be well.”

### 3. Connections with Others – Friend & Family

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*Elizaveta with her family*

- **This is what I have learned about family when I was a young person**  
“My father died on the front and my mother was left with three kids. My mom remarried and I was eight years old when I got a stepfather and nine when my brother was born. My stepfather loved my mother so much and we called him father. He made a big impression on me.”
- **This is what I have learned about my family as an adult**  
“I value my children and grandchildren. I put all of my efforts into them even though I did not have an ideal marriage.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as a young person**  
“My closest friend in my youth was Sarah, and to this day we still keep in touch and check on each other. We shared all of our secrets growing up but when we got married, we were not as close because we had our own lives. In the past, four couples did everything together until the kids got older.”
- **This is what I have learned about my friends as an adult**  
“It’s challenging to have friends in my old age because people like to gossip and create problems. Now I prefer just a few close friends and they generally live near me



because we have no cars. When something bothers me I let them know versus harboring the feelings. We used to be very social, but people are much sicker now.”

## 4. Connections with the World

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- **This is what I have learned about neighbors**

“My neighbors and I don’t get along. There are only a few neighbors that I even see regularly. When my grandkids were small, I would see neighbors frequently. But now that the kids are all grown, I stay away because all they do is gossip.”



*Elizaveta with her sisters*

- **This is what I have learned about community**

“My community is good in that it is clean. Our manager watches over everything. It’s not lonely in this community because there are a lot of people around.”

- **This is what I have learned about society**

“Society is much different today than it was when I was younger and living in a different country. People’s interests are different today than they used to be.”

- **This is what I have learned about the world**

“I wish there was peace in the world and that things were calm. People from different parts of the world have different perspectives and that makes conflict.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **This is what gives my life meaning**

“Peace and health give my life meaning. And that my kids and grandkids are healthy.”

- **This is what I care about**

“I want there to be peace all around the world.”



*Elizaveta at a social event*

- **This is what I think about luck**  
“I believe there is a higher force that we don’t know about, whether it’s a god or not but it is guiding us.”
- **This is what I want future generations to know**  
“To be kind. Always learn and always strive to be a good person. Respect your parents and older adults.”
- **This is what matters**  
“Friendships give life meaning but you must trust. Usually, it’s a select group of people.”
- **This is what I have learned about life**  
“If you have your health, you have the desire to live.”

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Laura Breitberg**



***Laura Breitberg, 80 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in Odessa, Ukraine on October 6, 1940. I was eight months old when the war started and evacuated to Siberia and then we came back to Odessa after the war. I graduated high school in 1957 and applied to university to become an English teacher and I graduated from there in 1969. Then I worked in an English magnet school until 1990 as an ESL and literature teacher and translator. In 1989 I applied to come to America and my cousin invited me to Israel. My daughter moved to Australia in 1989 and I also applied to Australia but was denied. Then the U.S. accepted my husband and me and we ended up moving to Kansas City. I began my career with JFS as a resettlement case manager and then I got a degree as a therapist and worked in a new capacity. In 2010 I retired at age 70 and came to San Diego with my husband."

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Laura at age 7*

- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“My first memory was in a small city in Ukraine when we were on our way back from Siberia to Odessa. My mother bought me an apple; it was the first fruit that I had, and I still remember the shape and color of it. I was almost in fear of it and did not know what to do with it. I also remember my father being a religious man and I was an outgoing child and played a lot. I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher and played the role of a teacher with other kids.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“My American relatives wanted to create a family tree and they all had a similar question for me. I said when I grew up in the former Soviet Union, the talk was about winning the war and Soviet heroes, but never did anyone mention the Holocaust until the late 1960’s when we celebrated the victory over the Nazis and the first poet who wrote about Babi Yar\* was the first one to say it out loud. Our identity was robbed and that’s part of why I wanted to leave my country. We felt shame being Jewish.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“I enjoy teaching, reading books, listening to music, dancing, having friends, traveling. In Russia we could not go outside the borders, so America was the first country we had ever been to and we traveled.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I like to travel, and I like to read in English and Russian - it was always part of my life. Young children can get to know the world through books. I like going to the beach with friends and going out and doing physical activities. I enjoy time with my husband.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

“That I am great at connecting with people. I am good at showing a different perspective to people about their family and their lives. My husband said that I am great at everything.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“I found hope in my previous experience working with children and how their lives evolve in front of you. For me, my students who have become my friends...give me hope that life has meaning. And being married for many years and our lives having hardships and we overcame those. I have hope we can overcome our current problems.”



*Laura and Roman at their wedding*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“Today, a good day is when you get up and you see that your body is working, everything is in good condition. We have a certain routine: we drink a glass of water with lemon in the morning, then a brisk walk before breakfast, sleep well, go through our routine, talk to our kids via Zoom.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“Good sense of humor; we are optimists. We always say that life is good. Sense of humor helps you look at things lightly. We tease each other and have a great support system of family and friends.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“So far, we still drive, I take care of all my personal hygiene, clean and cook as much as I can. I talk on the phone a lot with friends. I am proud of my family, we are connected to our adult children as well as our achievements as a team: me and my husband. I’m proud of my achievements in Odessa and then I got a master’s degree here in America. I’m proud of how I treated my life: it’s a gift to be alive.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I love reading, traveling, talking to people and friends, talking with my husband the most.”



*Laura receives Emily Levin award*



- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“What I have learned so far is there are things in life you can’t control and it’s hard to give up that control. But you learn to work with what you can do and find contentment and happiness in that and be successful in what you can do.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“Our lives have reached a point where we don’t have professional work things to do so it’s become very routine. The support of my husband and family helps my life in general. I also read a lot and have found many answers in books. I also continue to learn new things in technology and with the Internet. I don’t feel like my age narrows my horizon. Coronavirus makes a deviation but still gives us a different resource, tapping into our inner strength.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“I’m most proud of going back to school at age 55 and graduating as a straight A student and getting a Master of Social Work and being able to help people.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“I never thought about it as the ‘Holocaust’. I looked at it as something that happened to our Jewish people but didn’t prevent me from doing anything. However, I wasn’t admitted to university or promoted at work but that was the anti-Semitism policy of the Soviet government.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“I learned that my dad was in the army and he was drafted from the beginning of the war. I knew he fought but I didn’t know because I was eight months old. So, every time I saw a man in uniform, I would run in front of them walking by and ask if they were my papa. My mom and I along with my two aunts and grandmother lived together during the evacuation and my grandmother spoke Yiddish and that’s how I learned it.”



*Laura with husband and daughters*

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"First, my husband Roman. He is very sick now and I can't imagine life without him. We've been married 57 years and I have known him since I was 18 years old. He is the number one person I rely on for anything: emotionally, or small things, or a big endeavor we do together. We understand each other. Of course, throughout my life I depended on my parents but at a certain point, they have to depend on you."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"I am the peacemaker and diplomat. When things are not always good, I try to connect people together again. I'm proud of my role and it has something to do with my profession as a psychotherapist."

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

"My husband Roman, even now with his illness. He tries to do stuff that is routine, like make the bed, make coffee, cut me fruit. Even looking back when I decided to pursue my career and I had to study and work, he supported me all the way."

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

"Paraphrasing Eli Wiesel, humanity hasn't found a cure for cancer because some of the geniuses perished in the Holocaust. And I was part of the Holocaust and almost died myself."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I have an addiction to reading. It's my way to escape, get respite, and learn new things. I was an avid reader since I can remember. I have all the books I brought from Odessa. I'm also very curious and like to know about people and listen to their stories. You travel with the person or the writer."



*Laura with husband Roman*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**  
“I might not call it luck; I might call it to learn what choices to make and some people might call it luck. Your choices lead to the right places at the right time.”
- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**  
“I value family, goodness in people, kindness, love, and humor because it helps us a lot through life. The world survived because it laughed.”
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
“One of the lessons is before you know a person well, look for the good before you look for the bad. I always see people as good first until they prove to be something else. But that normally doesn’t happen because we surround ourselves with good people. I look at their good qualities first before criticizing and hope my children learned to do the same.”

***\*Babi Yar was the site of a 1941 massacre in the Ukraine by German soldiers in World War II. Approximately 33,771 Jews were killed.***

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Roman Breitberg**



**Roman Breitberg, 80 years old**

## Short Biography

“Born in Odessa, Ukraine, on April 6, 1940, I was one-year-old when the war started, and my family evacuated to Uzbekistan. But my father was recruited into the Soviet Army and was killed in the first couple months of the war. We were in Uzbekistan for four years and in 1944, we went back to Odessa and our flat was occupied. I went back to school and graduated in 1957, then applied to technical school to become a technical engineer. I graduated with honors and then served in the Soviet Army from 1960 to 1963. I also married my wife in 1963 while I was working as a mechanical engineer and also attending college once again. I did design work and became chief design supervisor. We left the Soviet Union in April 1991 and came to Kansas City, Missouri, where we lived until we moved to San Diego in 2010. We have been there ever since.”

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Roman, age 7*

- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“My first memory of myself was during the evacuation in 1944 when I was four years old. When my mother had to go back to work as a dietician in a resort, she worked long hours, so I was by myself a lot. When I turned seven years old, I went back to school and it was difficult in Odessa because the city was ruined after the war. Buildings were destroyed and for children like me it was exciting to play in the ruins - an adventure. We found guns and would pretend to shoot. There was a lot of crime at this time as well and at seven years old I saw a lot of bad things.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“My cousins from my father’s side didn’t evacuate Odessa and were sent to a nearby ghetto for several years. My cousin was interviewed a few years ago about this experience. I learned so much from their memories because I was so young during the war and we evacuated. I didn’t know too much about the history until writings about Babi Yar \* started to emerge.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“I enjoy so much. I am open to new adventures: people, traveling, learning. I was 37 years old when I started playing tennis and still today it is my favorite sport. Even now having cancer I still try to watch and play tennis. I like to read books. I also play cards and it brings me closer to my family because we played in the Soviet Union.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I spend time with my wife: I cannot be without her. We may do some things apart but mostly all our experiences are together. It’s been 56 years and we are not bored with each other.”

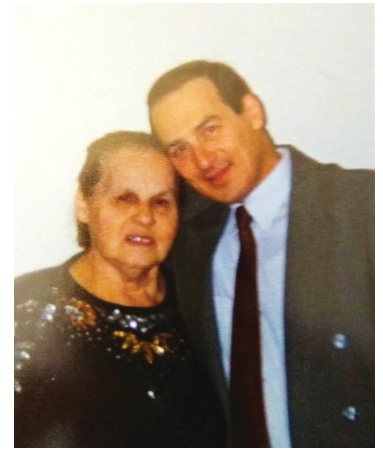
- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**

“People might say that I am easy to talk to. I’m kind, generous, I love to cook, and I can be with any type of person; it’s easy for me. But I can also be sharp in my opinions and intentions and that can cause conflict if I feel that I’m correct. Yet I can stop myself when needed.”



## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“Hope allows dreams to come true. All my life, I hoped to be freer, more independent, to work hard and accomplish what I wanted. That’s what I used to get me through life, this gave me hope.”

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“A good day is when I have something to do and I achieve what I planned to do. I am so proud that I can achieve things that I never thought I’d be able to.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“During difficult times, I come to my wife for advice. We find a solution and follow a plan. We discuss things and find a solution.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“Today I have cancer and it touches my life a lot. I don’t always talk about what is going on inside of me with my wife because she’s already so concerned. I try to do whatever I can on my own as far as my routine goes. We each have our own duties and sometimes it’s difficult to accomplish mine, but I try to do them anyway because it keeps me going.”

- **Tell me something you are really proud of**

“Despite the dangers of cancer, I am proud of what I’m doing now. Despite being on chemo pills, as they make me weak, I still play tennis two to three times per week; I play and I forget I have an illness. Live in the moment.”

*Roman and his mother*

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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*Roman and Army buddy*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I am planning to resume traveling and meet up with friends after Coronavirus and go to restaurants, etc. Those are things I love to do the most. We are 80 and don’t have much time but will still do all we can to live.”

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“I have learned from everything that has happened to me how to accept what you’ve been dealt and have the strength to deal with things.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“Myself, my wife, and my children are my resources. Then, if you have friends and a community, that helps you as well. Also, what’s inside of you helps. If you have it within you, it helps you through. All things help if you believe it will.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“When I had my first job in the U.S. as a design engineer, I was very proud because when we left the Soviet Union, we mainly thought about our children and giving them an education and a good life here. We didn’t think about ourselves. In the beginning here in America, I was a maintenance man to learn the language and then I became an engineer. I was so proud.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“I was born in 1940 and I was so young that I didn’t feel it. But my parents did feel it. And I heard stories and it touched me. Especially living in the Soviet Union, the point of view on Jews was so unfavorable. I was not promoted because of being a Jew even though I qualified. That made me think about the Holocaust and the humiliation.”

## 4. Connections - Friends, Family and the World

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*Roman with his wife and 2 daughters*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“My grandpa was still alive when I was young, and he lived in a shtetl close to Odessa and he had a hostel where people were fed and slept. But when the pogrom started, he moved to Odessa where I was. I was born in 1940 and remember the end of the war in 1945. We were all together. My grandfather had a good sense of humor, made jokes, and looked at life from a good point of view.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“Our family was made up of friends as well as actual family. We always had people to surround ourselves with. Today, I still Skype with my friend from my youth who actually married my cousin, and we were next-door neighbors for 21 years.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“I have always been supportive of my family and friends. I offer a positive tone to the people around me. People like to just sit and talk and come over our house because it was always so open.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“Laura, my wife, and my daughters are so devoted to us. They call, FaceTime, or Zoom every day. The conversations with them never bore us and we can talk for several hours about politics or just jokes and laughter.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“Yes, it did, but I was indirectly part of the Holocaust because I was so small and was evacuated. I heard my mother and my aunts (who were in camps) talk about it and I read so much about it. When I first came to Israel, I felt like I arrived home. It made me more connected to being Jewish. Not all people are the same and my past shaped how I view the world.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Roman and his wife Laura*

- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“All my life I have worked and still I had spare time.

I am a person who likes to do everything: tennis, read, play different games; most of all I like to travel. We did it all of our lives. It gave me energy and I have so many friends and it's always a joy to find them and I still have close relationships with them.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“Yes, I believe in luck, but also that every person has drawn his own way. And that's why every person needs luck. I was lucky: a good job, good family, good kids. I was always lucky. Now I'm 80 and not so lucky and it's not always dependent upon me. Stay in front of whatever comes and don't be afraid; just go through it. Look at things day by day, that gives me strength to fight on.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“What I value most: trust, love, and kindness from other people.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

“Unfortunately, I'm not so lucky there because neither of my daughters had children. But if I had grandchildren, I would share my vision of life with them and show by example of how to have a good and valuable life and for them to be good people”

*\*Babi Yar was the site of a 1941 massacre in the Ukraine by German soldiers in World War II. Approximately 33,771 Jews were killed.*

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: BORIS DASHEVSKY**



## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in 1937 in the city of Kharkov, Ukraine. When WWII started, I was around 4 years old. I had a younger sister and a brother. My uncles were in the army. I almost do not remember my father. My mother told me that he was much older than her. My father was fighting Germans during WWI. We have a photo of him in his military uniform, wounded and with crutches. He died in the city of Tashkent in 1943.”

“My grandfather encountered the Germans during the First World War. Since the Germans were treating civilians well at that time, when the danger of the German occupation arose,

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya



he did not want to evacuate from Kharkov. However, his eldest sons, who served in the army, persuaded him to evacuate. All my family members caught the last train to Uzbekistan and were able to leave Kharkov. There we were very poor and did not have enough food. The neighbors knew that my mother had three children. They had not seen us for a while, so they came over and saw that we were all dying of hunger. My youngest brother died from hunger and my mother, sister, and I were saved by our neighbors. After that, we moved to the city of Kokand, Uzbekistan, to live with my grandparents. We lived there until our city, Kharkov, was liberated, and we were able to return in 1944. After finishing school with good grades, I wanted to go and study at the aviation school, but I was told that since I am Jewish, it would be very difficult to get in. I decided to go to a technical college to learn how to be a civil engineer instead. I graduated in 1956. Right after graduation, I was obligated to go serve in the Soviet Army. I served in Siberia and Ukraine. After the army, I was accepted into the Construction Institute in Kharkov and graduated in 1965. For a long time, I worked as a supervisor of construction workers. While my boss told me that for my career to grow, I must become a member of the Communist Party, to make it easier to get promoted. After that, my career did grow. After the USSR fell apart and Ukraine became a separate nation. My family and I immigrated to the USA in 1997. My sister, who moved to the USA long before, invited us to join the family. I was married twice. I have two adult daughters who live in Germany. I also have two sons from my second wife. They are here in the US. I have 8 grandchildren: 2 granddaughters and 6 grandsons.”

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“After our return to Kharkov, I was supposed to go to school, but there were not many schools to go to. I did not get into school until 1945. I finished 7 grades. I remember every Monday the school principal gathered all the students together for a meeting and told us how many children were killed or wounded during the weekend. We were warned that there were many ditches with active mines in the forest, but curious children still went there. I also remember times when boys were fighting with each other until they were bleeding. Once, after I had won a fight, my opponent screamed at me, ‘Go back to Palestine!’ I did not understand what he told me. My grandfather explained to me about Jewish people and Palestine. I learned for the first time about Palestine, and how it was a Jewish land. I also remember that when we returned to Kharkov, we learned that all 50,000 Jewish people who stayed in the city were placed in barracks at a tractor machinery plant and, in a short time, all of them were killed. The ones killing the Jews were policemen working for the Germans, not the Germans themselves. I



remember that the city was in ruins. We had grocery cards, and I walked two kilometers every day to get in line for bread. Sometimes there was not enough bread for all the people. It was very hard to live at that time, we were hungry. As children, we did not have any entertainment, we made a ball from a tin can wrapped in rags. "

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"My family lost many of its members at that time: we lost my father, a younger brother, and two cousins. My grandmother received a letter from her son stating that he is going to free Kharkov. Shortly after that, she got a letter that he disappeared without a trace. My grandmother could not believe that he was dead, and every evening, for many years, she stood outside of her home, waiting for him. The death of my family members traumatized me for my entire life."

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I enjoy being social with my friends and relatives. I was always surrounded by kind people. I still try my best to communicate with people over Skype, Zoom and by phone. I love to read books and enjoy watching sports on TV. I also enjoy my family, which is the biggest joy of my life! I enjoy being a client at the Jewish Family Service."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"I get up at 6:30 in the morning, do some exercises and make breakfast. After that I sit at my computer to check my emails. My friends send me different information and funny stories. I also enjoy attending the College Avenue Center's computer and English as Second Language classes."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you're great at?**

"When I was a child, I was very quiet. My family members say that I look a lot like my father. My father was a humble and kind man with good character."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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*Boris and his uncle.*

- **What gave you hope until now**

“My family and my friends give me hope. Jewish Family Service provides me with financial and emotional support. I know that I’m not alone, and I have people who help me.”

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“Nowadays, every day is a joy for me. I am glad that we have many days filled with sunshine. When I talk to my children and grandchildren who live far away, that makes my day happy!”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“I was lucky that I had and still have a lot of kind people around me. I still communicate with them today. These people help me get through difficult times and even now, when I talk with them, I am always in a good mood. My uncle, Gregory was an officer during WWII. He was very smart, with a big heart, and great sense of humor. He helped me and my family a lot financially and emotionally. I often asked him for advice and always knew that I could count on him. When I was promoted at work several times, he always said that I had to think about other people and not be arrogant. In 2002, my uncle and his family arrived in San Diego. At that time, there was an organization in San Diego who supported WWII veterans. He was an active participant in this organization. I saw him on TV during the victory parade on May 8th. During all my life he helped me in everything I needed. I always remember him.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I like to clean my house. I like to attend the College Ave Center computer and English as a second language classes.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of**

“I used to be proud of my work, but now I am proud of my family, my children, and my relatives. I am proud that I am an optimist. I am proud that I live in the country that takes care of its people, not by words, not by posters, but in real life!”

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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*Boris with his wife and oldest son.*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“I mostly like to email my friends to communicate with them. They send me interesting information.”
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“Patience helps me move forward, and I am sure that everything will be alright! I am a very positive person and always hope for the best!”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“I never complain about anything. I do not give any advice to people. I listen to other people and my own intuition. I do not want to look back, since we cannot change anything. My life in the USA is good. I am happy with my life here. “
- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**  
“I am very proud of my children and grandchildren now. I was very proud when I was a civil engineer. It was my favorite job.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“The Holocaust took my good health away. I barely survived the famine. I am sure that our generation would be much more successful if the Holocaust would not have taken place. I achieved what I wanted in life because of the support from my family and friends.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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*Boris with his daughters and grandchildren.*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

"I grew up in a large family; some of my family members from both sides were religious. After WWII, during Sabbath at my grandfather's house, everyone put a Tallit on and prayed. Once one of the neighbors was passing by and noticed that my family was praying. The next day, that neighbor came over and demanded my grandfather give him money, or else he would report my family's religious activities to the authorities. He blackmailed my grandfather for a long time and ended up reporting it anyway. After that, my grandfather was in very big trouble. My grandfather, grandmother, and mother tried very hard to uphold the Jewish traditions and culture; I remember my mother trying to buy kosher chicken for us at the market. Unfortunately, I could not grow up in this environment. I was raised in a more secular household because open practice of religion was outlawed in the Soviet Union. Growing up I remember we celebrated Victory Day on May 9th every year. It was a very important holiday for our family."

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"I depend on my family, my children and my grandchildren. I think about them constantly and they think about me too. It is very important to me that they are all healthy and happy, because when they are, I am as well."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"I do not play as significant a role in my children's and grandchildren's lives as before. If they ask me for advice, I always help them out. I tell them about my life experiences to make sure that they do not make the same mistakes I did. In general, I try to not interfere too much with the lives of my children and grandchildren."

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

"I have many relatives here in San Diego. I depend on help from the government and the Jewish Family Service support me financially and emotionally!"



- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“First of all, the Holocaust ruined my life. I somehow survived through it. I still feel that hunger and cold, and the other nightmares of war. I still remember everything. It is difficult for me to remember what happened recently, but I remember everything that happened to me since I was 7 years old.”

“I read a lot about different eras and learned that history tends to repeat itself. Unfortunately, the situation in the United States is not the best now. Knowing what I experienced in the Soviet Union, I never would have expected to see such things here in the US.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“I am at home all the time, just like everyone else these days. I spend a lot of time on my computer. Each morning I try to walk and that is what gives me energy. I feel much better emotionally and physically after that. I also enjoy the English Second Language class, which makes me think hard. I try to socialize with my friends often, and because many of them have passed away, I try to enjoy every moment of life. “



*Boris is 83 years old, with his wife, sons, daughter-in-law and grandchildren.*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“I do believe in luck! Luck is not a simple thing. It always comes in the right time and in the right place. All my life I was surrounded by very nice people. They taught me a lot and I use that knowledge even today. Many events occurred throughout my life, which made it more interesting and luckier. In the 1960's I was just a supervisor of construction workers at the Kharkov train station. Once I was invited to the office of my boss and there, I met a young man. I was instructed to find a train ticket for this person to Moscow, which I did. When I accompanied him to the train, he said that he graduated from the military aviation school near Kharkov, and now lives in Moscow and continues to study. Then he asked me to write down his last name. And after many years I found out with whom fate brought to me: Pavel Belyaev who became a cosmonaut whom the whole world knows. Such events happen once in a lifetime.”

In 1980, before the Olympics, Vladimir Visotsky, Russian superstar during my Kharkov time, had concerts. He had only two concerts, and I was lucky enough to get tickets for both. After the first concert, leaving the hall, through the noise of the crowd, I heard Vysotsky's voice. When I turned around, I saw him. He was short, in a leather jacket and with a guitar in a case. He asked the crowd to let him go to the exit. I was able to attend both concerts, which, to my surprise, were completely different. Meeting this extraordinary person astounded me my entire life.

"I started my career as a supervisor of construction workers and then worked in various engineering positions. I achieved success in my work thanks to the literate and hardworking people who surrounded me."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I value love because it gives strength and confidence. I was taught to trust people and I had friendships with different people, I value them very much. I also value family traditions.

After my relatives returned from WWII; it was very hard for them to adapt to a new lifestyle. But we were glad they came back alive and every year for many years it was the tradition to celebrate Victory Day. "

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"This new generation is so much different here in the US and in Ukraine than mine was. They have such different perspectives on life. They are well versed in computers and technology. I want them to value time and life, continue to study, read a lot, know a sense of proportion, and love their family and work."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Lyudmila Fogel**



*Lyudmila in beautiful San Diego*

***Lyudmila Fogel, 90 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in Kharkov, Ukraine in 1931. I had an older sister. My childhood was good and at four years old we moved to Odessa for my dad's work and we were there until the war started. Then in 1941 we were evacuated. My father met up with us later in 1944 when we went back to Odessa. After the war, I returned to school and then went to university for electrical engineering. Although I wanted to study medicine, I wasn't accepted because I was a Jew. I became a radio engineer. I got married in 1953 after we met in university. My daughter was born in 1957. My daughter came to the U.S. first, then we came in 1992. I have two grandsons and two great-grandchildren."

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"My childhood before the war was happy. Caring parents, nice sister, etc. I had many friends and was outgoing. I was learning to play the piano. My mother was a pharmacist. My sister was eight years older than me and we were very close. My memories with my family were pleasant before the war."



*Lyudmila in Odessa*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"I always knew the government created anti-Semitism and I knew to be very careful with anything I said. It affected me years after the war. I would share very little because I knew that Jews were hated. Even today when I hear anti-Semitism, I remember how important it is to be careful."

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I enjoy being with my family. I also love concerts, symphonies, and literature. I read a lot, even in English. I love classical music and the Metropolitan Opera."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"At my age, it's hard to do the things I used to do. It's harder for me to get around nowadays. I used to be very active but now I have to depend more on others."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you're great at?**

"I make the best Neapolitan cake and a baked fish dish. I was an active reader and cook/baker. Everything was done with love."

# 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"When I was a child, I had hope from my parents. Then when I grew up, I had hope based on my own abilities. Today I have less hope because of today's



*Lyudmila with her husband, Vladimir*

situation. It is hard to see an end to this crisis and keep hope alive because I'm worried about humanity. During the war, my eyes were closed, and we did not know all the perils, so we believed in victory."

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
"When my kids or grandkids come to see me, I rejoice because it is my biggest joy. I can feel their care, love, energy."
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
"I used to depend on myself to get through difficulties and even help others. Today it's hard because I have to depend on others for help."
- **What are you currently doing independently?**  
"I can read on my own, watch TV, get myself ready, etc. I can go on walks by myself."
- **Tell me something you are proud of.**  
"I am proud to be in America and am proud that my family is all here. I am also proud at how successful my grandson is."

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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*Lyudmila at a celebration*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
"I enjoy seeing my family the most. Overall, I love to read, go to symphonies, and listen to music. Sadly, today I am not going to concerts but I do get to read a lot."
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
"In my life I have lost many things, including my husband. But I have gained optimism to carry on, especially in today's world. I try to think positive and keep my family in mind. I hope that the pandemic ends and there is peace once again in America."
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
"To get through difficult times, thank God I have my family. I also have help from JFS, the government, other resources, etc. that allow me to live my life well."
- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**



“My personal achievements were all accomplished back in my home country. But what I am most proud of is coming to America. My husband had a high position and couldn’t leave the USSR. Then in August 1992, he received approval to leave the USSR and we finally received permission to come to America. My daughter and grandkids were already here, and we were finally reunited.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“After the war, anti-Semitism was a real problem in the USSR, and I was prevented from attending medical school because I was Jewish. It prevented me and other Jews from accomplishing things in our professions.”

## 4. Connections - Friends, Family and the World

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*Lyudmila with her daughter Alla*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“I was raised in a very hard-working family. My mom was a pharmacist until she got ill. She was excellent at being a housewife as well. She taught me to do things properly like she did. My father was an engineer and instilled hard work and education in all of his children.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“I can depend on my daughter and son-in-law at any time. They even offered that I move in with them to make things easier for me. Although I choose to be on my own, I know it’s possible. My neighbor also checks on me and makes sure I don’t need anything.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“I used to be the one who always made meals during the holidays. Now, my role has mainly become to give advice, especially to my daughter. My neighbor always wants my opinion as well.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“My daughter helps me with everything. She even spends the night if I need her to. I also receive home care which makes my life so much easier.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

"The Holocaust made me feel concern for the future and for my family. I hope they never have to go through what I went through. I think most people are good, but it depends on their environment: anything can affect someone's behavior."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I enjoy watching good shows or reading interesting books. Most of the shows I currently watch are political. And the books I read are usually memoirs."

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"I'm not sure if I had luck in my own life or not, but I believe each person has a certain destiny. It comes from a higher power, perhaps God."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"My family. I have one daughter, two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"In today's day and age, I believe younger generations are much smarter than we are due to technology. They know so much more than we do and are so modern. But I can hope to pass along a belief in hope, love, and to be kind to one another."



*Lyudmila at 80th birthday party for her husband Vladimir*

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Irina Fridman**



## Short Biography:

"I was born in 1938 in Moscow. At the beginning of the war with the Nazis, our family was evacuated to the city of Tyumen in Siberia. In 1943, we returned to Moscow. We lived in a huge communal apartment, in which another 40 residents lived with us. After the war, Moscow had a hard and poor life. I was especially frightened when letters that someone died at the front came and the whole apartment began to cry loudly. We lived in one room, mom, dad, my older brother, and me for 25 years. In 1956, I graduated from high school and entered the Moscow State University at the geological faculty. After the University I defended my PhD thesis. I studied isotopes, worked in Cuba, Ethiopia, and Iran. In 1960 I got married. My son was born in 1963, and a few months after the birth of a son, my husband died in a car accident. In 1994, I went to Israel with my son. I lived in the city of Rehovot, worked on various hard work; it was difficult for me alone, although I have great relationship with my son. In Israel, I met a very good and kind man and married him. My son went to

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster

America, found a job and got married. In 2014, I also moved to America. I live in San Diego. I have three grandchildren.”

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“I spent my early childhood in evacuation in the city of Tyumen in Siberia. I remember that we lived in the barn where the rats ran and it was very cold. I got diphtheria and went to the hospital. I had to sleep in the same bed with another child to keep warm. My older brother already went to school. He was often teased and even beaten because he was Jewish, and he had to leave the school. In 1943, my father arrived and took us to Moscow. Near our house was a large yard in which we played ball and other children's games. When my parents bought a piano, I entered a music school and with great desire began to learn to play the piano. I always loved to study and even did my homework with pleasure. The post-war life in Moscow was very difficult. I remember that I stood in a huge line for bread, but right in front of me the last loaf of bread was taken by some guy. I came home without bread and cried for a long time. One winter, my parents bought me warm mittens and I lost one in the tram. I cried all day. I also recall school breakfasts; for breakfast we were given one small bagel and one toffee.”



*Irina with her friend at the restaurant.*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“My very good friend, who at the beginning of the WWII lived in Lithuania and went through all the horrors of the Nazi occupation, lives in Israel. She is already 97 years old, but she continues to tell people about the terrible wartime. This woman was in the ghetto, a concentration camp, she was even led into the gas chamber, but she managed to escape from the crowd. During the transition from one camp to another, she was able to get to the village and when she went into the house to ask for food, the Germans detained her and wanted to shoot her. After the war, this woman lived in Lithuania, and then left for Israel.

I think that the main reason for anti-Semitism is elementary envy turning into hatred. Jews are often not like other people, more entrepreneurial and successful. Anti-Semitism has been going on for thousands of years and in the near future it is impossible to defeat it, as people usually blame others for all their problems and often for no reason, they blame Jews. It seems to me that Israel is defeating its enemies on the battlefield but losing the information war. We need to continue to

write books, make movies, such as 'Schindler's List' so that people know about the horrors of the Holocaust and can fight with these causes."

- **What do you enjoy?**

"All my life I love and am interested in music. I like classical music: Beethoven, Chopin, Bizet operas, Paganini concerts for violin and guitar. In Israel, I went to the Royal Ballet of Great Britain, which consisted of three parts: very old and even ancient dances, classical, and modern ballet. In America, I volunteered at the Museum of Nature and History and the Museum of Science and was very happy when I saw the sincere interest and the 'burning' eyes of the children who came to these museums. I used to love to cook. Once I invited some American friends and organized a Russian table. Interestingly, they liked the food, except for red caviar."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"I continue to read a lot, however not thick novels, but biographies and journalism. On YouTube, I listen to the stories of Yuri Rost on the Culture channel. I am interested in the popular science literature on quantum physics, biology, various inventions. I do not speak much on the phone, mainly with my son and grandchildren."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

I love people and I am sure that initially every person is good. Sometimes people tell me that I see life through rose-colored glasses. I like the theory that God is love for people. When I lived in Moscow for some time I worked as the Scientific Secretary of the Council for the Defense of Dissertations and always tried to help people in this difficult and responsible work. People around me note my sociability, responsiveness, and friendliness."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"At my age it is already difficult to hope for a better life, but I continue to live and the desire to see my son and grandchildren successful and happy gives me strength and hope. I would really like to see my youngest grandson finish school and go to college. I also want to remain self-supporting and independent as long as possible".



*Irina with the group of seniors before attending the JFS event.*



- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“When I get up in the morning and feel relatively normal, this is already a good day for me. Daily phone conversations with my son also cheer me up. But the best thing is when my son and grandchildren come to me”.

- **What helps you get through difficult time?**

“Love for the son, a special feeling of compassion for him; because he grew up without a father, always helped me. Memories of the past, the thoughts that, despite all the difficulties, I was able to achieve a lot in my work and career, also soothe and help me in today's difficult life.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I have always been an independent person, but with age, my health becomes weaker, my strength is no longer the same, and maintaining independence is becoming more and more difficult. Still, I try to take care of myself, keep order in the house, cook something, go for a walk.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“My main merit is that I raised a good son. My husband - my son's father, died in a car accident a few months after he was born. It was very difficult to do all the household chores myself, successfully engage in scientific work, advance in my career and, most importantly, raise my son without a father. I am proud that, despite all the hardships of life, I was able to achieve a lot in my work, have a good career, write many scientific articles in my field of study specifically the use of tritium. I was a UN expert and scientific secretary of an international group for the study of isotopes.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I always liked my work. My scientific studies gave me the opportunity to constantly learn something new, meet smart interesting people, show my best qualities, and visit new unfamiliar places in the Soviet Union and abroad. One of the first in the Soviet Union I began to study the use of tritium, the radioactive isotope of hydrogen, and wrote several scientific articles. In my free time I was fond of music,



*At the movie theater.*

books and always loved nature. Now it is hard for me to travel, but I really like spending time in nature.”

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“By the nature of my industrial and scientific activities, I often had to work with people. I was the scientific secretary of various scientific councils, helped in the defense of candidate dissertations, while it was necessary to understand the goals and objectives of employees, help in determining the main areas of work, provide support in difficult times and even sometimes, if possible, cheer them up. All this helps me a lot in communicating with people now.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“With age, it is simply necessary that people be close around who can make your difficult life easier. For me, this person is my son, we have a great relationship and he always supports me. I can also note that the Jewish Family Service helps me a lot. Once I broke my leg, it was difficult for me to cope with the problems that arose, and the organization’s employees helped me with the preparation of various documents and the delivery of food.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“I am proud of my family, and the main thing in my life is that I raised a wonderful son - a very kind and worthy person. I also think that despite all the difficulties of life in the Soviet Union, I achieved a good career, successfully doing my favorite job - scientific and organizational work.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“When the war against the Nazis began, I was a small child; I spent my early childhood in evacuation in Siberia. Of course, the Holocaust had a huge impact on the Jews of the whole world. Millions of people were killed, millions of survivors lost their relatives, lost their health, home, property. After the war, persecution of Jews continued in the Soviet Union. In my work, I felt little anti-Semitism, but my son, for example, was not accepted to postgraduate studies because he was Jewish. When my son went to Israel, I visited him and received Israeli citizenship, they found out about this at my work and the attitude of the authorities towards me changed dramatically. All my life I reacted very painfully to any harassment on a national basis. But still, despite the general atmosphere of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, I was able to make a good scientific and professional career.”

## 4. Connections-Friends, Family, and the World

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*Irina with her son in Israel, 1996*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“My mother was born in a small Jewish town in Belarus. Her father was a religious person, and my mother said that their family lived in constant poverty. After the October Revolution when it became possible for Jews to move to central cities, my grandfather moved the whole family to Moscow. Mom often said that thanks to the Soviet regime, Jews can live freely, study at universities, and find good jobs. My father was also born into a very poor family, his mother was a laundress, and his father worked as a shoemaker and died in the 1st World War. Left without parents early in life, my father was able to finish school, go to university and subsequently earn his PhD and become a director of the institute.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“My parents have always had the biggest influence on me. Both mother and father were born and raised in very poor families, but thanks to their abilities, work, and perseverance, they were able to get a higher education, find a decent job and create a wonderful family. My mother was a teacher and while many children from disadvantaged areas and families attended school, it was very difficult to educate them. Good knowledge of the subject matter and authority helped my mother achieve good results at her work. When my father entered the rabfak (working faculty), he was practically illiterate, but he managed to take a four-year course of study in two years. Parents have always been a positive example for me. We had a typical Soviet intelligentsia family, we could not protest, but read the books of Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak prohibited in the Soviet Union and sincerely resented when Soviet troops entered Czechoslovakia in 1968.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“The main thing in my life that I was able to raise and educate a great son - a kind and sympathetic person, a wonderful father, and a successful specialist. During my career at the Soviet Union Academy of Sciences, I often met with different people, helped them in their work, and was respected by colleagues and management.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“I lived with my parents for a long time in Moscow. We had a very friendly and prosperous family, my parents helped me with everything. After the birth of my child

and the death of my husband in a car accident, I was in a very serious condition and only the help of my parents and good relations helped me to gradually get out of this state and continue to live a normal life. I also had good friends; their moral support meant a lot to me. In Israel, I got married a second time, my husband, who lived in the country a long time, has supported me very much in difficult times of a new life for me. In America, my main support is my son and grandchildren. I believe that everyone should be responsible for their own lives, not wait for constant help and try to do everything on their own.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“Before the Second World War, many smart and serious people said that the Germans are a cultured, civilized and educated on philosophy and literature, people, who will never allow war crimes. But already after a few months, and the world saw what human-hatred Nazi propaganda could turn ordinary people into. Almost all Jews who did not want or were unable to leave the Nazi invasion died in concentration camps and ghettos. History teaches that everything can happen in the world and that every person must make the right decisions in time.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“My favorite pastime lately is reading. I enjoy reading popular science books and articles. Recently I read a very interesting book by the Israeli scientist Harari ‘Sapiens’. On TV, I continue to watch educational programs about space and scientific developments. Also, sometimes I watch again famous and favorite movies, such as ‘Green Book’ and ‘Kramer vs. Kramer’. I can watch movies in Russian and English. I have a friend with whom I like to communicate; she comes to visit me, and we discuss our common problems.

In the morning I do some light gymnastics, I try to go outside every day and walk not far from home. My son lives in Carmel Valley and tries to come to me every week. Communication with my son's family is the main source of cheerfulness and energy for me.”



*Irina was a volunteer at the Natural History Museum from 2014-2019 in San Diego.*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“My life has been very difficult, and I do not remember any special luck. I think that in people's lives everything depends on them, we must not wait for good luck, but achieve our goals and go our own ways.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“The highest value in life is the health of your family. When I was young, I loved and appreciated my work, I liked good books, music, travel, meeting interesting people, and active rest. But now the main thing is health, my own and my loved ones.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

I have almost no interest in politics and I believe that ordinary human qualities should be passed on from generation to generation: respect for parents, caring for each other, love for children, desire to preserve nature. We must honestly do our job and always remain human. My three grandchildren continue family traditions. The eldest and middle are already studying at the University of Los Angeles, and the youngest is in the ninth grade. My dream is to see my youngest grandson also study at the university.”



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Evgenia Gurevich**



## **Short biography:**

"I was born in 1940 in Kiev, Ukraine. At the beginning of the war, in July 1941 our family was evacuated to Novosibirsk. During the move, we rode in freight cars and several times were under bombing. Two of my grandfathers remained in Ukraine and died at the hands of the Nazis. After the war ended, our family remained in Novosibirsk. From 1947 to 1957 I studied at school. My father worked at the Aviation Plant; my mother did not work. In 1957, I entered the Novosibirsk Medical Institute. In 1963 I graduated from the Institute and began working as a doctor. I worked for 18 years at the Novosibirsk Infectious Diseases Hospital. For many years I was the head of the infectious diseases department. In 1963 I got married. In 1964, a daughter was born, and in 1974, a son. In 1989, we repatriated to Israel, where we lived in the city of Beer Sheva in the south of the country. In Israel, I worked as a doctor in a clinic. In 2005, we moved to America. My husband and I live in San Diego. Our grandsons also live in America, and our granddaughter lives in Israel."

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“At the beginning of the war with the Nazis in 1941, our family was evacuated to the city of Novosibirsk. We lived

in a communal apartment in which several more families lived. There was no hot water and once a week we went to the bathhouse. In 1954, we received a separate apartment with a telephone. My parents bought a piano, and I began to study at a music school. I did not have any toys. I remember playing with other children with old pots and pans. I received my first doll as a gift from my uncle when I was six years old. In the summer, our family went to a small summer cottage near Novosibirsk. There was a forest around the cottage, a river flowed nearby, and I spent almost all the time on the street. I recall that we often went to a club with a movie room. Sometimes a puppet theater came to the club. There were many children in our school whose parents died in the war. I still have school photos. As a child, I loved to read, and my mother strictly followed the lessons in regular and music schools. In 1957, I graduated from high school with a silver medal.”



*Evgenia with her husband  
Peter*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“During the war with the Nazis, I was a little girl. I lived in evacuation in Novosibirsk and almost did not feel the war. My parents at home did not say anything. Only later I found out that two of my grandfathers remained in Ukraine and died at the hands of the Nazis. At the school where I studied, there were many children whose parents died in the war. I think that anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union intensified after Israel won the Six Day War in 1967. In the late 80’s, we began to learn more about Nazi crimes against Jews. While living in Israel, I learned more about the Holocaust. I was struck by the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem. I believe that the existence of the State of Israel is the best protection for Jews around the world. I think that we must continue to tell the younger generation about the crimes of the Nazis so that this never happens again. Our children and grandchildren already less know the history of World War II.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“First, when I worked as a doctor, I was completely passionate about my work. I believe that treating sick people is one of the most important activities on earth. My work was difficult with a lot of responsibility, but I was very happy when I could help people. Naturally, my life was not limited to my job. I loved reading books. I have always been interested in the history of the Jewish people. I remember the book of Josephus Flavius ‘Jewish Antiquities’. We had a good library at home. I read Russian classics: Tolstoy, Chekhov. But I also liked Dumas’ lightweight adventure novels.

When popular theaters and artists came to our city, I always tried to get to performances and concerts. I remember the concert of Alla Pugacheva in Novosibirsk. In 1989, I was at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow and saw Maya Plisetskaya on stage. In Israel, I loved going to the Gesher Theater. I loved to travel; was in Leningrad, Moscow, Riga, Tashkent, and other interesting cities of the Soviet Union. When we lived in Israel, and then in America, we went to France, Spain, Germany, Canada.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“Now it is difficult for my husband and me to travel and even visit friends, but we try to walk near the house or the ocean. Sometimes a friend from Los Angeles comes to us. Every day I look at the news on the Internet, I am very interested in life in Israel, where I have many good friends. My daughter lives not far from me, I used to take grandchildren to school and now I like to communicate with my daughter's family. In the evening I watch movies or a series.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

“My children and friends say that I am a sociable person. When we lived in Israel, I had many friends, especially among doctors. My work as a doctor required patience in talking with patients, the ability to listen and understand people. Efficiency and professionalism were also needed. Of great importance in the work was intuition. I recall two cases from medical practice in Israel. Once I cured a child of an unusual and very strong cough. After that, the boy every day on the way to kindergarten came to me and said, ‘Good morning and thank you’. And another case, the attitude towards Russian-speaking doctors in Israel was initially incredulous. Once I made a definite diagnosis for a child, but other doctors did not agree with me and even laughed. But after my diagnosis was confirmed, even the head doctor of the hospital began to consult with me. I always tried to take good care of my appearance. Once, when transferring to another job, I told my boss that I was 56 years old and I was hardly suitable for this job. He replied that he was sure that I was 35 years old.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

In the Soviet Union in Novosibirsk, where we lived, I had a good and responsible job, a high salary, an excellent apartment, and other material benefits, but there was no hope for a normal and peaceful life for me and my children. Anti-Semitic sentiment and speeches grew, my son, when he



*Evgenia and Peter Gurevich*

was 17 years old, was even beaten because he is a Jew. It became impossible to continue living like that, and in 1989 our family repatriated to Israel. We lived in the south of the country, I worked as a doctor in the city of Sderot. This city is known for being frequently bombarded by terrorists from the Gaza Strip. My son served in the Golani brigade and was injured. I was constantly worried about my children and grandchildren. First, my son, and then our whole family moved to America. The desire to live a normal, stable, and calm life, a strong and friendly family give me strength and hope that everything will be fine with us."

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"My husband's and my good health, the health of children and grandchildren, good news from my granddaughter from Israel are the main conditions for a successful day. Walking around the house, trips to the ocean, in the evening watching interesting television programs and especially reading books give me joy and make the day full and good."

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

"In my life there were difficult and even terrible times; the children were often sick, once my son was severely poisoned and lost consciousness, my husband suffered a heart attack, and we had a serious problem of finding work in Israel. But always in our family there was mutual respect, attention to each other, a sincere desire to help and overcome difficulties together. All my life I have been lucky to have good people around me -- in Russia, Israel, and America there have always been good, attentive, and helpful friends and this helped me a lot in difficult times."

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

"At my age it is already difficult to be independent. My husband and I try to do everything together, we cook, clean the apartment, walk around the house or along the ocean, watch TV in the evening."

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

"I am proud of my family, my husband, children, grandchildren, and I believe that the health and happiness of the family is the most important thing in people's lives. I always loved my work, achieved a worthy career, was the head of the department in a hospital in Novosibirsk, and at the age of 51 I found job as a doctor in Israel. My colleagues respected me, my superiors appreciated my work and good kind friends always surrounded me. I am grateful to fate for the fact that for many years we lived in Israel, observed, and continue to observe Jewish traditions."

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“My favorite pastime is reading. I sometimes reread books from my youth, for example, Dumas historical novels about Napoleon and Caesar, and I understand them in a new way. Every day I read articles on the Internet that interest me, news from America and around the world. On TV, I like to watch the Fox news channel and sometimes movies and TV shows. The last movie I liked was ‘Once Upon a Time in Hollywood’ by Tarantino. When our family gets together, I like to cook some dishes of Russian cuisine, my favorite dishes are jellied meat and Olivier salad.”

*Evgenia with her husband*

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“Over the many years of my work as a doctor, I have gained invaluable experience in human relationships with different people. In my youth I was very trusting, all people seemed to me equally good. During my medical practice, I talked a lot with patients, work colleagues, superiors and learned to better understand people. Patience, attentiveness, the ability to listen to any person are very useful to me in my life. I tried not to have conflict and not to interfere in the lives of strangers. This helped me to keep many good friends in the Soviet Union, Israel, and America.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“Of course, the main thing in my life is the family: husband, children, grandchildren. With my husband, we try to do everything together and help each other in everything. We have wonderful children and grandchildren, and we maintain good and close relations among ourselves. I have relatives in New York, I can always call them and talk about our common topics. My rich experience as a doctor in the Soviet Union and Israel also helps me a lot in my daily life.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“After graduating from the Novosibirsk Medical Institute, I started working as a doctor in the Infectious Diseases Hospital, at the age of 35 I became the head of the department, and at the age of 40, the deputy chief doctor of the hospital. Arriving in Israel, I was able to find work as a doctor at the age of 51. The main thing is that I have a lovely husband, children, and grandchildren, and we maintain a wonderful relationship.”



- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“I have worked as a doctor all my life and consider this profession one of the most important on earth. I was surrounded mainly by kind, sensitive, and sympathetic people, who often helped me in my work and life. I almost did not feel anti-Semitism in Novosibirsk. But after the victory of Israel in the Six Day War of 1967, attitudes toward Jews began to change. At the end of the 60s, I wanted to switch to teaching, for a significant salary increase with more time to be spent with my children. I successfully passed several interviews and even the deputy rector of the institute said he was impressed with my work and recommending me for that position. But after a while I got turned down from the personnel department, although several of the non-Jews were able to get this job. In the hospital where I worked there was one doctor who publicly said that we have too many Jewish doctors. Despite this, I believe that I was able to make a successful medical career and help many people.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family, and the World

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*Evgenia and her Family*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“After the war, our family stayed in Novosibirsk, we lived in a 2-room apartment, mom, dad, my brother, and I, and then my aunt, daughter and grandmother came to us and we began to live together - seven people. My father often talked about his family; his grandfather was a famous rabbi in Kiev. Mom talked less; her relatives lived in Moscow. My grandmother's siblings worked as engineers and were involved in the construction of the Moscow metro. Mom said that her father came to Kiev in 1936 and bought a small house in Podol in the Jewish district. At the beginning of the war, my grandfather did not evacuate from Kiev, his daughter worked as a nurse in a hospital and the grandfather did not want to leave her. My grandfather and my mother's sister were killed in the ravine of Babi Yar at the hands of the Nazis. In 1946 we went to Kiev and learned about the death of our relatives.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

In my third year at the institute, I went to a sports camp and there I met one student who was a member of the Komsomol committee of the institute. He was a very proactive and purposeful guy. He was fond of photography and microbiology, was a witty conversationalist, constantly told funny stories. Subsequently, he earned a PhD

degree and became a professor. I liked him very much, but my mother wanted me to marry only a Jew and our meetings would stop. When I was already living in America, this person wrote to me by e-mail; for several years we corresponded, but now, for various reasons, our correspondence has been interrupted. The guy's name was Zhenya, he was an example for me and influenced my subsequent life.

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“When I oversaw an internship in Novosibirsk, my friend Zhenya, whom I have already talked about, ended up in the hospital. My friend Emma worked in this hospital and I asked her to help Zhenya with something. He received a good ward, the caring attitude of the medical staff, the necessary medicines, which in those years in the Soviet Union not everyone could get. We met Emma in a residency course in medical genetics. She helped me get a job at the hospital, for 18 years we worked together and helped each other in everything. Recently my friend Emma died.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“Jewish Family Service helps and supports my husband and me. Tanya Livshits works in this organization - a very responsive, benevolent, and simply sincere woman who is always ready to help us. We receive food packages, financial and emotional assistance, and timely necessary advice. My cousin lives in New York, she is a very close person to me, almost every day we communicate by phone or skype. I can discuss any topic with her; her advice and support are very important to me. My best friends live in Israel in the city of Beer Sheva. Their names are Anya and Zhenya, they worked as doctors and when I lived in Israel, I turned to them with any problems and they always helped me. We celebrated all holidays and birthdays together. Unfortunately, now my friends are very sick, and I rarely call them.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“I think that all Jews can be victims of modern anti-Semitism. The Holocaust also began, seemingly, with insignificant events: articles in newspapers, graffiti on the walls of synagogues, groundless accusations of Jews when problems arose, and ended in ghettos, concentration camps, gas chambers and mass extermination of Jews. We cannot close our eyes to any manifestations of anti-Semitism that sometimes occur in Europe and even in America, and it is necessary to constantly fight this shameful phenomenon together. Israel has its own problems. In recent years, a lot of people who do not have any ties to Judaism came to the country, these people sometimes simply hate Israel and cause a split in a society that needs unity.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Evgenia in Jerusalem Western Wall*

- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“At present, in America, as in the rest of the world, the restrictions associated with the coronavirus continue to apply, so our life has changed significantly. We can no longer communicate freely with our friends and relatives, and we hardly even go to shops; our children bring us all the necessary things and products. But my husband and I try to walk outside, sometimes we go to the ocean. At home, I like to listen to political reviews on radio Chicago in Russian on YouTube, and excellent observers such as Igor Tsesarsky and Ivan Denisov work on the Continent program. I like reading books, recently I read with great pleasure the biography of Mark Twain and the novel by Jack London ‘Martin Eden’. Lately my husband and I have been tidying up our old photos; we have saved hundreds of photos and we scan the most successful of them so that our children and grandchildren can see them too. When I look at my photos when I was young, I remember the pleasant moments of my life and it improves my mood. But, of course, the main source of energy for me is communication with our children and grandchildren.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“I think that in my life the greatest success is the wonderful people who surrounded me. But you should not wait for your luck with folded hands; you need to go to it and fight for it. I would like to tell you an example from my own life that shows how seemingly random events led to a successful start of my career. When I was studying at the institute, I liked one guy and because of him I began to attend a microbiology club. The head of the club at this time needed a laboratory assistant and he decided to take me to work. When I signed an application for employment with the rector, it turned out by chance that he also needed a laboratory assistant, and so I ended up in the laboratory of the rector of the institute. Once I successfully translated a scientific article into English and based on this article the rector went to a conference in Oslo, Norway. After that, it became much easier for me to do scientific work and advance in my career.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“Each person has their own life values, and it is difficult to say which is more important. I really appreciate the dedication in the family, respect of parents, love for children, sincere friendly relations. It is necessary to remember the good and be grateful to people and life in general.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
“Leaving children and grandchildren an inheritance of money is good, but they themselves can earn. I believe that if a person in adulthood remembers his childhood with joy, then life is going in the right direction.

Now people, and especially children, read less books than we used to, we mostly get ready-made information from the Internet. But books written by outstanding authors help and make people think. The desire to read good books must be instilled from childhood.”

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Peter Gurevich**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1938 in the city of Gatchina, Leningrad Region. In 1940, our family moved to Vyborg. At this time, my father served in the Red Army. In 1941, we moved to Leningrad. In January 1942, during the blockade of Leningrad, we were evacuated to the village of Priluki in the Vologda Region. I know that we drove along the famous Road of Life along the ice of Lake Ladoga - the only road connecting Leningrad with the Great Land. In 1945 I went to school. At the end of 1945, our family moved to Novosibirsk. In 1955, I graduated from high school and entered the Novosibirsk Electrotechnical Institute. After graduation, I began working in Sibelektromontazh as an engineer. In 1963, I went to work at the Electoproject Institute, where I worked until 1989. In 1963, I got married. In 1964 my daughter was born, and in 1971 a son. In 1989, we repatriated to Israel. I worked at a chemical plant in Beer Sheva. In 2005, we moved to America. My wife and I live in San Diego."

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster



# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Peter and his wife Evgenia*

- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“In January 1942, when I was a little child over three years old, our family was evacuated to the village of Priluki in the Vologda Region. There was not enough water on the road, and when the train stopped, we quickly went out and collected snow. We melted this snow and got water. In the village of Priluki we lived in a house where there were many evacuated children. On the roads, we often saw columns of soldiers heading to the front. In 1945, our family moved to Novosibirsk. We lived in a military camp in a barrack. For 10 rooms there were two shared toilets, and the products were stored in the cellar next to the barrack. I spent a lot of time on the street, played soccer with my friends, rode a bicycle, and skated in the winter. Sometimes we watched a movie in a military town. I remember the movie Tarzan. I studied well at school. Boys and girls studied separately. I recall one teacher - an officer who went through the war. He taught mathematics and physical education. In 1955, I graduated from high school with a gold medal.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“At the beginning of the war, living in Leningrad, I managed to feel all the hardships and horrors of wartime. There were constant bombing, sirens and air-raid alarms howled. On the way to the evacuation, I had to spend the night in a snow dugout. I saw a huge number of soldiers going to the front. The soldiers were not spared; victories came at the cost of enormous sacrifices. After the war, I saw columns of captured Germans. Before the war, I had many relatives in Belarus. My two grandmothers, grandfather, and cousins died during the mass executions of Jews. My uncle went through the whole war and moved to Israel. He died in Israel at the age of 91. My children studied in the Soviet Union and I tried to tell them about the terrible wartime. I think that my grandchildren already know little about the war, and in school children should study the history of World War II.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“I play chess at an amateur level and before I even had regular partners. I enjoy watching European football, NBA basketball, tennis tournaments at a good level on

TV. In my youth I liked to ski and participated in ski trips. Living in Israel, I took care of my grandchildren, liked to go to the cinema with them. Sometimes my wife and I attended theater performances in Russian. In America, several times we were at concerts of Russian bards at various private homes. I like the poems of Igor Guberman and Igor Irtenyev, also I enjoy Klezmer music.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I get up early at 6 a.m., do exercises for 20 minutes, and exercises for my back. After breakfast I like to walk when the weather is fine. I have a driver’s license; and my wife and I used to go to Del Mar and walk along the ocean. At home I check the news on the Internet, read various articles on the computer.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

“When I worked, I tried to do my job as well as possible. People around me noted that I always had order and accuracy in things and documents. It is important for me to complete any work that I undertake. Now I also try to organize my life, make a small plan for several days. For example, I mark in the calendar the time of visits to doctors, the birthdays of relatives and friends, various memorable dates.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“I always wanted to live an active life.

Previously, it was a job, a good, interesting vacation and raising children. For me now, the usual quiet life is important; the opportunity to take daily walks with my wife, watch good movies together and, most importantly, communicate with children and grandchildren and enjoy their successes.”



*Peter and his wife at a restaurant*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“The beginning of a good day for me is the opportunity to take walks in favorable weather which strengthens me, improves my well-being, and improves my mood. The health of my family, the successes of children and grandchildren in work and school are also an indispensable condition for feeling it was a good day.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“When we repatriated to Israel, especially in the first months and even years, it was very difficult for me. I did not know Hebrew at all, for a long time I could not find work, several times I was fired. But the perseverance and emotional support of my wife helped me a lot to overcome difficulties. Now, during the not usual and uncertain situation with coronavirus, the desire to live a normal life with my wife, children, grandchildren give me strength and hope that the epidemic will end, people and the country will cope with its consequences, and we will continue to enjoy ordinary human joys.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“Every year, it becomes increasingly difficult to do something on your own. I recently whitewashed our apartment. Sometimes I can cook something, for example, I make homemade cottage cheese or cook delicious buckwheat porridge. I clean our apartment and, together with my wife keep order. I use a computer, various applications, and programs.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“I am proud that I always and everywhere faithfully performed my work. I am very pleased with the success of my children and grandchildren. My son graduated from the University of Israel and works in ‘high tech’ in America. The youngest grandson is an excellent student, studies karate and water polo, I have been to his team’s games several times.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I like to read on the Internet various articles of journalists, international observers, and writers who I understand and who are in line with my interests. I like Russian authors on the Echo of Moscow channel: Belkovsky, Svanidze, Latynina. Also, I read and listen to Boris Gulko - this is a famous chess player; he was the chess champion of the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Now he writes sensible review articles about life in America and Israel. I listen to Radio Chicago 3-4 times a week, and Echo of Moscow every day.”



*Peter with his wife*

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“I worked at the Electropoint Institute in Novosibirsk for over 25 years. Over the years, I have been acquainted with many people whose experiences I learned from and helped me later in life. It was difficult to find a good job in Israel, but my long work experience helped me get a job at a chemical plant.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“The main source of a normal, quiet life is a friendly, strong family. My daughter lives not far from me, in a neighboring house and we see each other almost every day. My son comes about once a week, but every day we talk with him on the phone. We also have good close relations with our grandchildren and granddaughter. The assistance from the government and Claims Conference also greatly facilitates our lives, for example, assistance with health coverage and living conditions (housing) is very important for us.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“I came to Israel, at the age of 51. My friends did not believe that I could get a normal job, but I managed to find a good job, my wife worked as a doctor in a hospital and our family was able to lead a decent lifestyle: we bought a house, we made many new friends, we went on vacations in Europe.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“The most important achievement in life is that my wife and I were able to raise beautiful children and maintain good and warm relations in our family. In Novosibirsk, where I lived for more than 40 years, almost no anti-Semitism was felt, but several times I came across its manifestations. When I was in the 10th grade of the school, some guys teased me with the label ‘Jew’. At work at a design institute, employees of my level and qualification were sometimes sent on business trips to Italy and France, but I never was on a business trip abroad, as there was an unspoken instruction from the leadership not to send Jews abroad. But, despite the difficulties, I believe that my work was successful, and the production experience and knowledge came in handy in later life in Israel.”

## 4. Connections - Friends, Family, and the World

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*Peter's Family: wife, daughter, grandson, granddaughter and Peter*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

"As a child, I knew very little about my relatives, since before the war my family lived in Vyborg, and all the previous generations of our family lived in the town of Gory in Belarus. During the Nazi occupation, almost all my relatives died in ghettos and concentration camps. Before the war, my father graduated from a military school, served in the Red Army and was a platoon commander. During the war years, during evacuation, my mother worked on a collective farm in the Vologda region, and when we moved to Novosibirsk, she began to work as a seamstress, and then in a polyclinic at the registry. After the end of the war, my mother and my younger brother went to Belarus to find out about the fate of the surviving relatives. My uncle--my mother's brother-- served in the Red Army, was an artilleryman, fought against the Nazis, and later I met him in Israel. My cousin currently lives in Israel."

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"For some time, I worked in Novosibirsk in the commissioning department, I had a boss by the name of Knyazev. He was fond of art, painting, and poetry. We often talked and his hobby influenced me; I became more interested in art, began to collect albums of famous artists, poetry collections, etc. I had two friends at the institute, but when I left for Israel, the connection with them was cut off. Another friend of mine, named Mark, lives in Los Angeles. We used to see him often, but recently, due to our age and the general situation with the coronavirus, we mainly communicate by phone or e-mail. At the design institute where I worked there was a chief specialist by the name of Burgin, he taught electrical engineering at the institute. I attended his lectures, it helped me to improve my qualifications in my specialty."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"During my work in Novosibirsk, students were often sent to me to guide their graduation projects. I helped to find a theme for the project, various necessary design materials, wrote reviews of finished graduation projects. With this, I helped many students defend their graduation projects and get higher education."



- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“The main support is my family: my wife, children, grandchildren. Our son came to America five years earlier than us and did everything so that we could adapt to a new life, which is no longer so easy at our age. Our friend Mark, who has lived in Los Angeles for a long time, was also very helpful to us. Jewish Family Service continues to provide us with all possible support: we receive emotional and financial assistance, food packages, gifts for holidays and birthdays. With the help of JFS, we attended various interesting events, such as concerts of Yevtushenko, Guberman, Shenderovich, Mikhail Kozakov and other famous and popular poets and artists.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“During the war, I was a child, lived in evacuation, and only much later did I learn about the mass deaths of Jews in concentration camps and ghettos in the territory occupied by the Nazis. People were killed just because they were Jews. I believe that it is necessary to pay attention to and suppress any manifestations of anti-Semitism, which has taken deep roots in Europe and, unfortunately, even in America.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“Even during the coronavirus quarantine, I try to live a normal life. In the morning I walk with my wife not far from home, if the weather allows, we go to the ocean, do routine household chores, sometimes our son comes and brings us food. Now a granddaughter from Israel is visiting us. Every evening we have dinner and talk together; it makes me very happy. I am interested in politics. I follow the process of elections in the USA. In the evening, my wife and I watch TV. I really liked the movie ‘King's Gambit’. I also subscribe to and read the Los Angeles Panorama newspaper in Russian.”



*In Julian CA*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“The first meeting with my wife was a really lucky and successful one. I wanted to meet another girl, and she had a friend who became my wife. When I emigrated in Israel, I was already over 50 years old, and at that age they were almost never accepted for a normal job. By chance I met a friend of mine from Novosibirsk, he said

that one contractor was looking for an electrical engineer; so, I found a permanent job."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I appreciate talented and extraordinary people. My friend lives in Los Angeles, we studied together in Novosibirsk and worked in the same organization. Arriving in America, he began to work as an engineer, now he is 83 years old and he continues to work. I believe that talented people will always find a place in life and succeed."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"Such human qualities as decency, love for one's family, attentiveness and respect for each other are always important in every generation. Our children and grandchildren are often in a hurry, they are not interested in the problems of the older generation, but still, sometimes it is worth listening to the opinion of parents and grandparents."

# Life Lessons - 2020

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**Name: Lilly Hecht**



*Lilly Hecht, 97 years old*

## Short Biography

"Like so many Jewish children living in Eastern Europe, my early memories involve wearing the yellow star and being separated and harassed in school. But there was much worse to come for me. At a family Seder in 1944, my father said we would be lucky if we ever saw our beautiful dishes again. And on Shavuot that same year, at the age of 21, I entered Auschwitz. The train ride took four or five days. We had to go to the bathroom in a bucket. After arriving at Auschwitz, we had to remove all our clothes. It was the first time I ever saw my mother naked. This shocked me. My father was taken away and I never saw him again.

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

"My mother was a very smart woman. She looked out for me but kept her distance, making sure no one knew we were mother and daughter. I passed by Dr. Mengele once but he did not examine me. We were sent to the gas chambers one day, but for some reason, they weren't working. My mother said, 'I think they forgot to pay the gas bill'.

"I was in Auschwitz for about five months. After that, my mother and I were sent to a factory where we made bombs. I contracted scarlet fever and ended up in the infirmary. I was so sick I didn't even know the Russians had arrived. They put me on a transport to Theresienstadt. From there I reunited with some family at a ranch in Hungary.

"A man I knew before the war, Alberto Hecht, found me in Hungary and proposed immediately. But I wanted to go to Mexico, where I had a brother and other relatives. Alberto helped my mother and I get the papers for Mexico, but he couldn't get a visa for himself. So he got one for Cuba, and I met him there and we got married. We returned to Mexico and eventually had three beautiful daughters, who eventually moved to the United States. Alberto and I followed them here. Alberto has since passed away and I now live near one of my daughters in Chula Vista."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"I was very a quiet child but very happy. My grandparents had a ranch in Hungary. I would go there for holidays and play with my cousins."



- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"We learned how to fight to keep going, to survive. And to forget."

- **What do you enjoy? How do you like to spend your time?**

"I like reading and watching things on YouTube like opera, ballet, and Cirque de Soleil."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you're great at?**

"I'm good at knitting and cooking and baking and making friends. My family says I have a good sense of humor."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**  
“To see my daughters and

grandkids and great-grandkids grow up. To be able to live in freedom.”



- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
“Seeing the ocean. Going to a restaurant and eating fish tacos. Spending Shabbat with my daughter and my grandson.”
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
“I wait until it passes.”
- **What are you currently doing independently?**  
“I can eat, but I can’t cook. I shower by myself and dress with some help. I can walk alone, especially if I want a chocolate chip cookie in the kitchen. I go up and down stairs by myself, slowly.”
- **Tell me something you are really proud of.**  
“I’m proud I had the strength to survive the war. And I have three amazing daughters.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“I like going out with my friends, reading, and going for a car ride to see the ocean. It’s so beautiful. I feel very calm when I’m watching it.”



*Lilly and Alberto on their wedding day*



- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“I learned that you have to keep fighting. Always keep fighting.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“My daughters, my friends, my caregivers, Jewish Family Service, WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organization).”
- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**  
“When I got to San Diego I plugged in the coffeepot and that was the glue that put together my friendships.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“Yes, I was unable to finish high school.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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*Chula Vista Mayor Mary Casillas Salas is surrounded in front rank by Holocaust survivors. Lily is 2<sup>nd</sup> from left,*

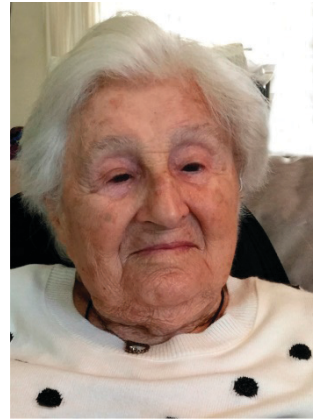
- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“I learned Jewish traditions and how to keep a kosher house.”
- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“Besides my family and my caregivers, Claudia and Maribel, I have a very good friend Clarita who calls me every day to see how I’m doing.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
“The Holocaust changed everything. It confused me even more than I already was.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“Before COVID-19 I would go out with friends to a class every Monday at WIZO. They had different speakers. We would have lunch afterwards. There were 12 to 18 girls in our group, all over 70. I was the oldest.”



- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“My daughters, my grandchildren, and my great grandchildren.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

“Nothing good came out of the Holocaust, but I learned that you can survive.”

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Vladlena Koreva**



*Vladlena and her great grandson*

***Vladlena Koreva, 87 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in a shtetl in Ukraine called Bershed in 1933 and moved to Kiev soon after I was born. I was the only child and had a normal childhood. I took dance lessons and would take trips to Bershed to visit my grandparents and stay for the summer. I had lots of friends and we spoke Yiddish and it was very joyful. On June 22, 1941, life changed abruptly. The war started in Kiev, but we were visiting in Bershed and my father was fighting on the front. He died in the war. My mother and grandparents and I evacuated to Northern Caucasus and when the Nazis

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

approached, we evacuated to Turkmenia in Central Asia until 1945. After the war, we returned to Kiev. I then finished school and later was accepted to university to study linguistics. My uncle had to bribe them to take me because there was a Jewish quota. I was married in 1955 and had my daughter in 1957. I came to the U.S. in 1990 after my daughter came. I have one granddaughter and two great-grandsons.”

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“I was very spoiled because I was the only child, my parents and grandparents paid a lot of attention to me. I was raised in a loving environment with lots of attention. I always thought life would be like this.”



*Vladlena in her 20s*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“In concentration camps, people managed to keep hope and strength alive and managed to celebrate holidays such as Passover and Hanukkah and even had weddings during such horrific times. Hungry women even wrote and exchanged recipes in the evenings and in the middle of the night, created recipes on pieces of scrap paper. Throughout my life, I understood we Jews are strong, we help each other, lift each other up. We are talented, triumphant, and I have so much respect for our people. On September 29-30, 1941, the massacre in Babi Yar by the Nazis killed 34,000 Jews and 100,000 people in total. On this day in September, we used to come to this tragic place with friends to cry, to remember, to get together with other Jewish mourners. Now there is a huge memorial in the park; the newest exposition offers high columns with holes, like traces of bullets. When people pass by, they see their own reflection in the polished columns.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“I enjoy life. I value life even at 87 years old. I love America. I love every leaf on a tree. I enjoy the sun. I enjoy everything around me. I love to read and be on the Internet.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I enjoy learning new things. I like books and movies. I want to gain knowledge from what I read and hear. I love my daughter and granddaughter and great grandsons. I know how to occupy my time.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

“I hope people would say that I’m honest and devoted in friendship. All of them appreciated our hospitality. My husband and I invited guests to our house very often, and I did my best to be a good and attentive hostess, listened to everyone and maintained interesting conversation. The relationship in my family was unbelievably close, truthful and open.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“I try to remain positive and always set my mind up for positivity. I am an optimistic person and even today with little hope for the future, I try not to think about the negative. I must look at things in smaller increments of time.”



*Vladlena with husband, daughter, granddaughter*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“A good day for me is when I go on my walks and I am pain free, especially nowadays. I need my walks to feel good. I take my headphones and listen to music. I prefer to end my day with a nice walk after I have done all my essential things.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“Time helps me get through things. Memories help me get through things. The death of my husband was so hard on me, so I used my memories to remind me of the good times. Also, your body helps you get through pain. Of course, my family helps me through, too.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“On good days I am walking. I also watch a lot of movies. I choose what I like and navigate Netflix. I also use the Internet to watch films and lectures. I talk to relatives on Skype and try to cook and do everything on my own.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“The most important thing was that we were able to come to this country when we did. And we were able to retain the same values we had before we got here. To treat other with kindness and sincerity.”



### 3. Challenges and Successes

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*Discussion with friends in Kiev*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“I love to write. I like to be around people with interesting views. We don’t have to agree, but we can engage in conversation.”
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“We came to a new country so it could feel like home and we could feel certain it would be positive for future generations. That everyone could have happiness in their country and make a good life for themselves. Access to food, education, etc. This is what we believed America to be. But I realized reality is not always perfect. There are problems in this country too.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“I have my family around me. They make things easier for me. I can speak my mind and I still have my family. We need leaders who can keep this country together.”
- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**  
“I am proud of my position here. I came to a foreign land with rules from the old land. It took me many years but then I figured out what this country is about. And I’m proud of what I’ve discovered and learned, and I’m not influenced by propaganda.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“Everything that happened to me personally - lack of books, lack of education, etc. - happened because of the war. But with the help of those who believed in me, I stepped up and got educated and read and learned as much as I could even though I had obstacles as a Jew.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family, and the World

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*Vladlena with her husband in Kiev*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“My mother had two brothers. My uncles always included us, especially after the war because I lost my father. My uncles were like my friends; they had my back.”
- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“I have a variety of people I can depend on. My friends, my husband when he was alive, and of course my daughter today. But mainly I depend on myself from how I start my morning to what I read to what I get done.”
- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**  
“My family comes to me for love but not for advice. I am older but do not interfere because my role is not the same as when I was young. I go to them for advice now.”
- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
“My daughter calls me several times a day to check on me. JFS also provides me with support that I can depend on and it’s so touching, and I wish I could pay back. Also, my caregiver really helps me day to day.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
“The Holocaust turned my world around and I can’t believe some people don’t believe it ever happened.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Vladlena and her husband  
at their granddaughter's  
wedding*

- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I get energy from writing my memoir. I also enjoy reading Shalom Aleichem's "Wandering Stars" as it moves me with the writing being about Jewish life. I myself was born in a shtetl and grew up around the Yiddish language so his book really speaks me."

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"Yes, of course I do. We survived so many hardships during the war, and when we returned, things eventually fell back into place. We had a small home, I started university, and then I met my husband by luck."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I value life more than anything else. The life of my child, grandkids, and also this country. I chose to live here and all the above adds to my life and my happiness. And all the decent people I've met throughout my life."

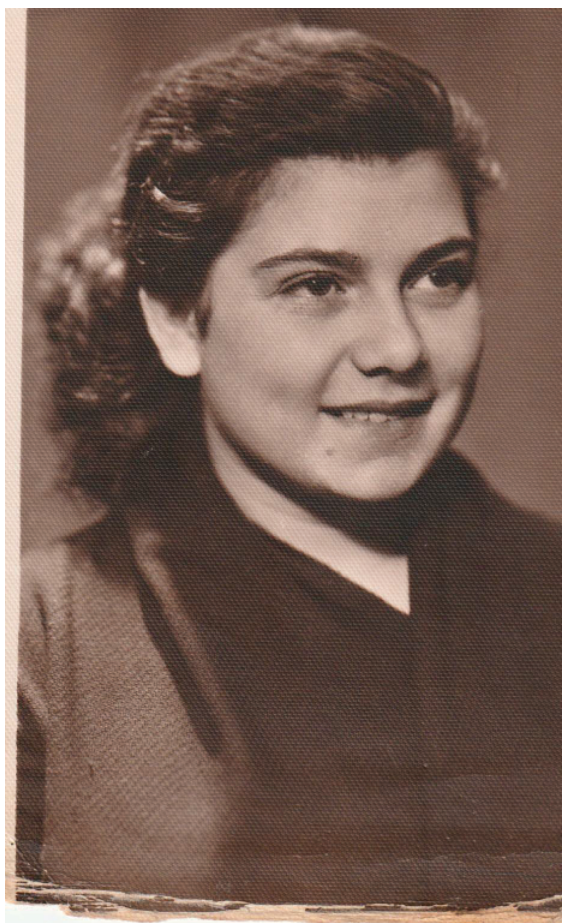
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"The most important thing is to get an education and profession to give you choices. To be a decent and kind person. And to know the difference between your friends and your enemies. Read a lot all the time to understand people and situations."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Ida Kushnir**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, before WWII started in Russia. My family was very religious. My maternal grandmother did not want to evacuate, since she was sure that the Germans would never kill Jewish people. When the Germans came close to Kharkov, my family learned that they killed Jewish people. My mother was a doctor. When we evacuated, she only took a sewing machine and family pictures. My father was working at an institute and was evacuated to a city called Frunze, my parents divorced during the evacuation. My mother, my grandmother, my father's relatives, and I were at the last train, and we went to the city of Molotov, now the city of Perm'.

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

I got sick on the train with an infectious disease, but my mother cured me. My mother separated from my father's family over there.

When my family came to Perm', there were harsh winters. I got sick again, this time with dysentery. At that time, many children died because of this disease. My mother decided to give me breast milk, and I survived because of it. When I got better, my mother went to ask if she could be sent to a warmer place to work. She was sent to Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, to be a doctor at an orphanage. We moved to Alma-Ata, my mother worked there and at the same time she sewed clothes for children. We stayed there until 1943, when the Soviet Army liberated Kharkov. My father came to us and said that we have to move back there."

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"I was almost four years old when we returned to Kharkov, my mother saw that our apartment was destroyed. Our furniture was stolen. There were many empty apartments, but my mother was afraid that people would come back from the frontlines and ask us to leave. She found out that there were some apartments available where Germans had lived but they were then already gone. I remember the apartment she did find and our nice neighbors. My mother eventually found our stolen furniture. It was very difficult to live after the war. We did not have anything, complete poverty. My mother was working part-time at a bread factory, since she was allowed to take a loaf of bread home every night. She also worked part-time at a soap factory and was allowed to take home some soap. I remember our apartment was always cold in the mornings."



*Ida with her mother and grandmother.*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"Horrible memories! I do not know how to explain to the younger generations what we went through and how to make sure this nightmare never happens again. Throughout my life I was 'stained' because I was Jewish. I suffered all my life because I am Jewish. When I was 12 years old, my mother had a Russian friend with a husband, who had high status in the Communist party. Their friend, Misha, was placed in jail because he was Jewish. My mother learned about this and went to see her friend to find out how to help save Misha. My mother's friend asked her husband what to do and he suggested to my mother that she always remember who she is, and that she



has a young daughter and elderly mother. I heard it all and understood that I am Jewish, therefore, I have to keep my mouth shut all the time.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“My children are my joy. They also suffered because they are Jewish. My son, when he got back from the Soviet Army, married a Jewish girl, who also suffered because she is Jewish. They got married and immigrated to Israel. They had a hard time over there. I am very happy that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren also live in Israel. My daughter came to the USA by herself with two children. Her husband did not want to go. I enjoy my grandchildren and great-grandchildren very much. I have four great-grandchildren in Israel and five great-grandchildren in the U.S.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I love to read. I also like to cook delicious things for my family.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**

“I communicate with other people in English, I know how to use a computer. I am a loving and caring grandmother and great grandmother.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“My children give me hope. My children and grandchildren help me a lot! I have good relationships with them. My grandson always calls me and asks if I need anything.”



- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“I have a good day whenever I can get up and walk in the morning, and when I sleep well at night. A good day is when I receive good news from my family. They call me every evening and tell me that everything that happened that day.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“I always hope that the negative things in life will pass and the positive things will prevail. This belief never leaves me and gives me strength.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I am trying to cook dinner for my husband and myself and take good care of myself and my house.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of**

"I am very proud of myself that I can read English. I know how to use a computer and I understand what is going on in the world."

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"I love my kitchen, and I love to cook. I love to sew and tailor clothes for me and my husband."



*Ida with her husband and her great grandson*

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

"My life experience at work and in life. I met good and bad people. I learned that it's better to avoid bad people, but I always try to find something good in all people."

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"My daughter helps me a lot with everything and my grandchildren and daughter-in-law, who live in Israel, also help me emotionally. They call me often and come to visit. They are my life."

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

"I raised my children well and allowed them to get a good education and good professions."

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

"I achieved much more because of the Holocaust. I started to appreciate my Jewish heritage much more than before. We got to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union, which was an antisemitic country. My grandchildren are very happy to live in the land of opportunity, where Jewish people can live freely. I met a few Jewish people from Poland, who survived the Holocaust. I saw them going to a synagogue. I was standing by the window crying, thinking how wonderful it is that people can practice their religions freely and not be afraid of persecution. In the former Soviet Union, Jewish people did not have such opportunities and only practiced Judaism in secret."

## 4. Connections-Friends, Family and the World

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*Ida with her family.*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

"My family was very religious. My ancestors had a very large family a long time ago, so I have many relatives. They had their own house and a cow, but when the communists came to power, everything was expropriated. One of my relatives, who was 17 years old, immigrated to the U.S. despite being a member of the Communist Party. He lived in the USA and found his brothers who still lived in the Soviet Union. He wanted to help them, sent gifts and letters, but the family was under pressure from the authorities, so they had to refuse gifts and tear letters. When my relatives finally came to the United States in the 70s, his four daughters could not forgive my family for their relationship to him. They could not even imagine how horrible life was for Jews in the former Soviet Union."

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"My daughter and grandson are special people; they help me physically and emotionally. They do everything for me, and my husband and I am grateful for their help."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"I play a big role in the lives of my family members because of my age and life experience. They ask for my advice, listen to it and share their problems with me."

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

"My husband and daughter support me in my daily life; they help me mentally and physically. "

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

"While living in Ukraine, I told my children about the Holocaust. After that, my son decided to immigrate to Israel. Two years later, my husband and I came to the United States. Now I understand better what it means to be a Jew and what needs to be done to prevent the Holocaust from happening again. I value life much more, especially here

in the United States. Unfortunately, my son passed away in Israel, but my grandchildren are very happy to live there.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Ida is 79 years old, with her granddaughters and great-grandson.*

- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“I feel cheerful when my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are healthy and happy. They help me a lot. I love reading books, Jewish magazines, news and articles on my computer.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“I believe in luck. First, my entire family is fortunate enough to come and live in the United States. The second thing that I consider to be pure luck happened when my children left our hometown to work in different cities. I went to the cemetery to visit the grave of my mother, who had died three months before. I asked my mother: "How will I be all alone?" To my surprise, the very next day I met my future husband. Since then, we have been happily married. There have been many luck events in my life.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“At my age, the most valuable thing is health. I also appreciate good and decent people.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

“I want future generations to appreciate and understand their parents and not offend them. Young people need to know what the older generation has gone through and always remember and appreciate that we are Jews.”

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: RAKHIL LIRTSMAN**



## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in 1940 in the city of Kiev, Ukraine. WWII started in June of 1941. My mother was a pharmacist in the military. She was told by the authorities to place her children in an orphanage and go to the frontlines to fight the Germans. At the time, my father was in the military. My mother realized that if she were to put me and my sister into an orphanage, we would die. She decided to reject going to the frontlines, which, because of WWII law, was considered betrayal, for which she would have been killed for. My mother, sister, and I tried to escape Kiev, but it was impossible to get to the train station, since there were thousands of people already trying to leave the city. My mother convinced a military commander to provide us with a train car,

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya



which evacuated us from Kiev, and went to the city of Kharkov. We met my father there and he took us to the Ural region, to the city of Troetsk. There it was very cold, and we were hungry all the time. My mother's sisters asked us to come to Uzbekistan to stay with them, so we went there. My mother could not work since she was in hiding, so we stayed in Uzbekistan until the war ended. My father was a military contractor and he was directed to Poltavsky suburb. He found us and together we went to Poltava, Ukraine in 1944. We stayed there until the war ended. In 1947 I went to school in the city of Lubna, Poltavsky suburb. By that time, we lived in the city of Lutsk. I finished school in 1957 and was going to study at the Medical school in the city of Chernovtzi, but I did not get in. I started to attend the Construction school. In 1959, I graduated from school and returned to Lutsk. I worked as an engineer. My salary was very low, so I decided to go work for the military instead. In 1961, I was accepted to the Rovensky Water Institute. I graduated in 1969 and by that time I was married and already had a son."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"When we evacuated, I was eight months old. For three years we were in evacuation and I remember when my father arrived. I was home alone, playing in the yard. When he arrived in his military uniform, with a beard and mustache, he saw me and said: 'Daughter, come to me!' I was scared and hid under the dress of the Uzbek woman, who was our landlord. My mother and aunt came later and took me home. My father brought some bread, and I got a big piece, but one crumb fell on the floor. I was looking at it and wanted to pick it up and eat it, but my mother said: 'Let it stay there.' I contracted an infectious disease, measles, and was hospitalized, I almost died at that hospital. My mother tried her best to feed me and she saved my life."



*Rakhil with her family.*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"When I was young, my parents strongly encouraged me to marry a Jewish man. I learned that during the war people were embarrassed that they are Jewish. So many people, who were married to non-Jews, were betrayed by their own spouses, and killed. I understood that intercultural marriages were discouraged. Even if my husband is not the best partner, I know that he would never betray me because of my Jewish heritage. I do not believe in God. How he could allow six million Jewish people to die during Holocaust? I became an atheist. If Israeli government existed at

that time, the Holocaust would not have happened. We all have to support Israel as much as possible!”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“I love to read books and communicate with my family and friends.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I love to spend time with my grandchildren and tell them about the Holocaust. I have three grandchildren. Their success makes me happy. My granddaughter is in medical school. My second granddaughter is a mathematician. We solve geometric problems together. She is so fast at it. My grandson is 16 years old and he likes to fix computers and electronic equipment.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**

I am very friendly and quiet. I do not like conflicts and love to socialize with people.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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*Rakhil with her husband.*

- **What gave you hope until now?**

“I hope that my children will be happy, successful and healthy. I hope that there will be peace in the world. The U.S. economy will be great again, and we will support Israel as much as we could.”

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“My son and grandchildren come over once a week. When my son calls me every evening, he says that everything is good, which makes my day. Also, when I call my sister in New York, she tells me that she is alright, it also makes a good day for me.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“My sister’s moral and emotional support helps me to get through difficult times. She has much more life experience and always tells me that everything will be fine!”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I read books, watch TV, and cook meals for my husband.”

- **Tell me something you are really proud of**

"I am very proud of my parents. My father was a very intellectual person. He could do anything. He could sing beautifully and play piano. My mother was a pharmacist and chemist. She was a participant in the war with Finland. She was a strict mother, but at the same time she lived for her two children. She was a very kind person. She was always ready to help everyone. I am also very proud of my son. He was the best student at school. He served in the Soviet Army. He is a very handy person. He can do anything, just like my father. My son is a very responsible person. He is an engineer at a hospital."

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"I love to read. If the book is interesting, I can read it all night long."



- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

"My communication with people helps me move forward. When I was younger, my personality was different. I lost many friends because of that, but I, finally, understood that in order to have friends and communicate with people, I had to change. I became more patient with people. Now I am very quiet and before I say something, I always think first!"

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"When I am not in a good mood, I usually go outside to meet with my neighbors. We joke a lot. I tell them funny stories and it helps me feel better."

- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**

"I was very proud of myself when I graduated from the Water Institute, even though I had a little baby at the time. It was not easy for me. I always worked very hard as an engineer-constructor at another institute and got a prize for the colossal project that our institute created. Back then, I was very proud of myself because of that."

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

"When my parents were alive, they told me that I should always remember that I am Jewish. Because of the Holocaust, I had to work harder than anyone else and try my best to accomplish what I wanted in life. I always remember what my parents taught me, and it helped me to achieve my goals."

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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*Rakhil with her friends and relatives.*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“I learned that my grandmother and my three cousins were killed by Germans in May 1942 in Vinitskaya oblast’, a province of Kalinovka, Ukraine. My paternal grandfather had a large wine store. By that time, he could not have a store in his name, therefore it was assigned to someone else. That person wanted to sell the store and immigrate, but my grandfather bought that store. In 1917, when Soviets came to power, they expropriated the store. My grandfather got a heart attack and died afterwards. My maternal grandfather had his own mill and a piece of land in the forest. In 1917, the Soviets expropriated all of that as well. Every year he was invited to the KGB to ask where he hides his gold, gems, etc. He was beaten every time and as a result, his health deteriorated. Our family hated the Soviet system.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“I do not have special people who I depend on.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“I am trying my best to make their life easier. I help my sister as much as I can.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“My oldest sister, who lives in New York, has supported me emotionally all my life. She is a very dedicated friend and a beautiful person. My son supports me a lot as well.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“Definitely, I understood a lot after the Holocaust happened. I am dedicated to Israel with my heart and soul. The Holocaust is a tragedy to all Jewish people, and it cannot ever happen again. The Soviet government knew that Jewish people were dying during WWII and instead of organizing the evacuation of Jewish people, there was an order not to let people go. The Soviet government was the same Holocaust for Jewish people as German fascists were.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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*Rakhil, 80 years old, with her husband and granddaughter.*

- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I like to read and watch TV. I like to take walks in the evening. I hope that our quarantine will end soon. That thought gives me energy."

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"I believe in luck! When we decided to leave the former Soviet Union, my son was in the military. We decided that it was time for him to quit. It was pure luck that he left the Soviet Army without any trouble. We also got lucky during the interview at the American Embassy. Fortunately, my son did not have any issues during the interview, even though he was in the military. We immigrated to the USA without any troubles."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I really value honesty. I do not like when people lie to me. I also value loyalty and I would never forgive betrayal."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"I would like to pass on to my children and grandchildren my love and devotion to Israel and the United States. I am very grateful to the U.S. for giving us everything that we need for a good life. I also would like the future generations to know that if they achieved something in life, do not stop. Go ahead and achieve more because everything is possible if you put your mind to it. My relatives were killed by Germans during WWII in the city of Kalinovka, Vinnitskaya Oblast'. I went there to visit their graves and it was a nightmare. I saw two huge graves covered in grass and between them was a pile of manure. I was in shock and swore on my grandmother's grave that I will do everything in my power to make their graves look proper. I gathered some money and decided to send it to the mayor of the city of Kalinovka, who I was hoping would repair the graves. He received the money but told me that it wasn't enough. I also sent letters to the President of Ukraine, asking to help me, but got no answer in return. I also wrote a letter to the President of Israel, Simon Perez, who never replied to me. I had a friend, who spoke German, who I had asked to write a letter to Angela Merkel, explaining the situation and asking for help. In less than a month, I got a reply from the office of Angela Merkel that they sent the money (8 thousand Deutsche marks) to Kalinovka. After that, the mayor of Kalinovka sent me pictures of the repaired graves."



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Gerhard Maschkowski**



*Gerhard age 95, at home in San Diego*

## **Short Biography:**

"In 1933, when I was eight years old, someone in a brown shirt came into the classroom and put all the Jewish children in the back of the room. That's when it began for me. I was 13 when I entered my first forced labor camp in 1939. Four years later, I walked through the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau and became Prisoner #117028. I survived by passing myself off as an electrician or whatever else the guards were looking for. If it sounded good, I raised my hand.

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

"When the war was winding down, the SS guards marched us through Germany and Czechoslovakia, just ahead of the Red Army. I collapsed towards the end and woke up in a hospital. The war was over.

"I went in search of my parents, who had been imprisoned in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. I found them in the Deggendorf displaced persons camp in Bavaria. My future wife, Ursula Nauman, was also in Deggendorf. She had also survived a concentration camp. We immigrated to the U.S. in 1947, got married in New York in May, and moved to Miami in October. We lived in Miami for 32 years and I opened an auto repair garage.

"Ursula and I had three children, a daughter, and two sons, and after I sold my business in 1979, we moved to Los Angeles and lived in a wonderful home there. To my great sorrow, Ursula passed away in April of 2005 of amyloidosis, a rare blood disorder. We had been married for 58 wonderful years. My son Frank and I decided to sell the house and move to San Diego, where I live today."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"There was nothing that I was missing. My parents bought me a little red car that you could pedal around the block. A policeman stopped me and said you cannot drive that car anymore if you don't have a driver's license. So, I went home and told my father, and he made one for me. I was five or six years old. The same policeman stopped me again and I showed it to him. He said, 'O.K., you can go.'"



- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"My outlook on life has been completely different than other people's. For me, things can never be as bad as they were during the Holocaust. You learn that only big things can get you down. I also learned that you have to look after yourself. The first three camps I lived in were forced labor camps. Unconsciously, you do what you have to do."

- **What do you enjoy? How do you like to spend your time?**

"Playing Canasta and bridge. Solitaire on the computer. Rummikub. Speaking to schools about the Holocaust. It makes me feel good because I can tell about the American dream. Young people think they have it so bad. They don't realize it's just difficult. I came here with only \$4 and look what I have now."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**  
“Reading. Talking on the phone. I’m on the phone every day with my family and friends.”
- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**  
“Fixing things. In the old days I worked for somebody who was Lebanese, and nobody could fix his Cadillac but me. He helped me open my first garage.”

## 2. Hope and Strengt

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- **What gave you hope until now?**  
“It can never be as bad as it has been. Everyone has problems in their lives. Don’t go to bed mad, because when you wake up, you’re still mad and it keeps on going and you’re looking for trouble.”
- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
“Going swimming in the summer in the pool. Playing cards with my friends.”
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
“My wife and I moved from Miami to New York with only \$75. We were broke but we were young. We could eat, we could sleep, and we had each other.”
- **Tell me something you are really proud of.**  
“How I made it in this country. When I came here, I had \$4 in my pocket. No language. No relatives. Young people are very upset if their parents take away their cell phone, but I explain to students that it’s not a tragedy.”



*ID card from Degendorf DP camp*

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“Reading. And talking on the phone. I’m on the phone every day, talking to my family and friends.”



*wedding photo of Gerhard & Ursula*

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“For some reason, the Jews always prevail. The Inquisition almost destroyed us. Hitler almost destroyed us. But we’re still around and now we have a country.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“I can be self-sufficient. I’m slow and I have a hard time walking. My daughter comes over and sometimes she stays overnight. My son helps me a lot. Jewish Family Service sends in a housecleaner.”
- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**  
“When I built my own auto repair shop in Miami. It was 10,000 square feet and ran from one end of the street to the other. We built it in three sections, from 1961 to 1963.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“Yes, my education. I got my high school diploma in 1956 in Miami. I was married by then, with kids. I wanted to be an accountant, so I went back to school at night while working during the day as a mechanic. I was staying up until 2 a.m., studying. I was a nervous wreck. I had to quit.”

## 4. Connections-Friends, Family and the World

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*Gerhard's father in Army uniform*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“My father was a German soldier who was blinded in World War I. After that, he supported the family as a typist and was very successful at it. In the years after World War II, my father and I had quite a few arguments. He still supported Germany - when they took everything away from him! That was something that the Nazis did. Not his country. He didn’t see what was really going on.”
- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“My daughter and my sons take care of me. They get me whatever I need.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**  
“I play cards with my friends, we talk, but not about politics. They believe whatever Trump says. They know I’m a Survivor. I tell them I know more about life than they do!”
- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
“I have an aide who comes four or five days a week to help with cleaning and cooking. My children help me with shopping.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
“Naturally, the Holocaust changed the world. During World War II, 51 million people died. Hitler changed the world. People think differently. This country went upside down because of that. You can never ever eliminate the hatred.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**  
“Sharing my opinions on the Internet. I get a lot of flak, too! Speaking to classes about the Holocaust.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**  
“Things do happen because of luck, and they can save your life. Both my parents and my immediate family survived the war. That’s a one in a million chance.”



*Gerhard on his first day of school*

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**  
“My success. I lived the American dream. I came to this country from Hell and I did O.K. We came from nothing. Our family was decimated.”
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
“Don’t ever go to bed mad at your loved ones. It can never be as bad as it once was.”



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Sofiya Rashkovetskaya**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1935 in Leningrad. My father worked as an instructor at a factory; my mother was a housewife. Before the war, I often visited with my grandparents in the city of Gatchina. I lived throughout the war in besieged blockaded Leningrad. My father went to the front at the beginning of the war and was wounded. In 1943, I went to school. After graduation, I entered the Construction Institute, and then went to study at the Cinema College. I worked in the Construction organization Leningrad.Org.Stroy in their information department, and then was engaged in patent work. In 1990, our family emigrated to America. My daughter and grandson live in La Mesa. My sister moved from Israel and lives in San Diego also. I have 9 medals dedicated to the WWII."

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster

# 1. Looking at myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"My childhood memories before the war are related to the city of Gatchina, where my grandparents lived. During the war, I lived with my mother, grandmother, and aunt in Leningrad. I spent the whole blockade in the city. The winter of 1941-1942 was very cold, 30-35 degrees Celsius below zero. We stoked the stove with leftover furniture, old clothes, and even books. At night, we slept four people in one bed to keep warm. There was no food or water. 125 grams of bread

were issued on cards a day. In two weeks, my younger sister, grandmother and two cousins died of hunger and cold. I got to the hospital, where they gave a little more food. Special cars drove through the streets, which collected the bodies of people who died on the street from hunger and cold. In 1943, I went to school. Already in the first grade we were taught how to use gas masks. In 1944, I sat at the same desk with a girl named Jenya. Now she lives in New York. This is my best friend for over 75 years. At school I really loved geography. After the war in Leningrad, transportation did not work well, so I walked all the time and was well-orientated to the streets of Leningrad."



*Sofia in her youth*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"At the beginning of the war in 1941, I visited with my grandparents who lived in the city of Gatchina near Leningrad. When the German troops approached Gatchina, my parents took me to Leningrad, but grandfather decided to stay and finish household chores. A few days later, when he was already going to the rail station, German soldiers saw him. Grandfather was arrested and soon hung in the central square of the city. For almost a week he was not allowed to be removed. The Nazis said that this would happen to every Jew. As a result of inhuman Nazi propaganda, introducing overt anti-Semitism into people's heads, the Holocaust occurred. Hostility to the Jews and hatred give rise to crime. Unfortunately, this is true now. Anti-Semitism is a crime and must be fought together."

- **What do you enjoy?**

"A few years before we left for America, we received a garden plot. Together with my husband we built a small hut, built a greenhouse for tomatoes and cucumbers, planted currants. At that time, I liked working on the ground. In Leningrad, I was spent time knitting, even knitting a wool suit for myself and sweaters for the whole

family. In America, I became interested in embroidery paintings. I gave paintings to my daughter and grandson.

Since I do not drive a car, I often had to ride a bus or walk and so I got to know the streets, squares, and architectural structures of San Diego. There are 225 apartments in the building where I live, and sometimes my neighbors and I went on excursions. I remember and enjoyed JFS' sponsored trip to Palm Springs. In our house, one of the neighbors (I think he was Italian) was fond of music. He had a large collection of records and CDs and we came to him to listen to music. Once he invited us to the theater. It was a small beautiful and cozy theater in San Diego. To our great pleasure, the artists of the Mariinsky Theater of St. Petersburg performed."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"Usually I get up early, put myself in order, and at 8:45 a.m. a bus arrives at our house and together with several neighbors I go to a Health Care Center for the elderly. During the trip, I like to look out the window and get to know the streets and houses of San Diego. At the Center we get breakfast and lunch, and lectures, concerts, competitions, and other interesting events are held. At 3 p.m. we were driven home. In the evening I used to read articles and watch TV, but now because of eye problems I must listen more than read."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

"My colleagues have always noted my sincere interest in work, hard work, perseverance, and diligence. For all the time of my work activity, over 92,000 inventions and patents passed through my hands. From all over the Soviet Union, specialists came to our department to exchange professional experience. Also, I was always distinguished by curiosity. I was very interested in the magnificent palaces and parks of Leningrad and visited many of them. Most of all I liked the palaces of Yusupov and Tavrisheskiy."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"A friendly and strong family gives me strength and hope for a peaceful future. My daughter, who lives in La Mesa, calls me several times a day and constantly comes to me. My sister moved from Israel to America. She also lives in San Diego and we often meet with her. My grandson has a very good relationship with me."



*Sofia with her husband, daughter, and grandson*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

“A good day for me is the day I get up in the morning, put myself in order and go to an Adult Day Care Center. There I am among people just like me, we often have common interests, we communicate, sometimes listen to amateur concerts and lectures, or play board games.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“My family always helps me. My daughter constantly comes by. She brings groceries and prepares food for me. A visit to the Adult Day Care Center makes life easier, for example, every day we get breakfast and lunch at the Center. My memories and conversations with friends also give me strength in difficult times.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“Almost every day I go out for a walk near my house. In the evening I turn on the TV, although lately I listen more than watch because of problems with my eyes.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“I had a very successful marriage. My husband served in aviation, he was a handsome and smart guy and really liked me and my family. We lived together for 55 years and always loved, respected, and helped each other. Together we would cook, clean the apartment, make repairs, raise our daughter. I am proud of my family happiness, memories of a happy family life warm and help me.”

### 3. Challenges and Success

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*Sofia with her husband Mikhail*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“In my youth I was fond of knitting. I knitted various warm clothes, for my whole family and for myself I even knitted a woolen suit. In America, I was fond of embroidery paintings, several of these paintings I presented to my daughter and grandson. I have always been interested in the history and architecture of St. Petersburg, now it is already difficult for me to read books and watch TV, but I continue to listen to audio stories about my hometown with pleasure.”

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“For a long time, I worked in the Information Department studied and drafted various inventions and patents with various documentation. This work required accuracy,

care, and caution. Now I have vision problems and the habit of keeping order helps me a lot in everyday life.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“My family is my main resource, my daughter constantly visits me, brings groceries, and cooks food. Before quarantine related to coronavirus started, I went to the Adult Day Care Center. I liked to spend time there. I talked with people of about the same age as me, we had common interests, often had informative and interesting lectures and meetings. I really hope that when the situation with coronavirus improves significantly, our Center will continue its work.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“I was able to survive the blockade of Leningrad. In 1955, I got married and lived with my husband for 55 happy years. I love my daughter and grandson and they answer me the same.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“The terrible siege time left an indelible mark on my life. Many of my close relatives died or lost their health during the war and the blockade of Leningrad. It is very hard and bitter for me to remember that time and I do not think that war can help ordinary people in any way. Despite the general difficult and often unjust life in the Soviet Union, the blockade survivors were respected. For memorable dates, we were awarded medals, I have 9 medals dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, in the 90s I was given a 50% discount on public transportation, medicines, utilities.”

## 4. Connections - Friends, Family, and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“Before the war, when I was a young girl, I often lived with my grandparents in the city of Gatchina, Leningrad Region. Usually, they took me from Leningrad for the whole summer and I spent a lot of time outdoors. At the beginning of the war, my parents managed to lead me to Leningrad, but my grandfather remained in Gatchina and died at the hands of the Nazis. I spent the whole Leningrad blockade in the city. In 1943, my father returned from the front, he was wounded and lost his vision.”



*Sofia at jubilee*



- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“In the first grade of school, I was sitting at the same desk with a girl named Zhenya. We became very good friends, and our friendship has been going on for 75 years. Our families were also very close, we were at each other's wedding, celebrated holidays, birthdays, and memorable dates together. We have been together all our lives. Now Zhenya lives in New York, but almost every day we talk on the phone and remember our difficult life.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

In 1961, when I began to work in the information department, a young woman worked there, whose name was Elga. I became friends with this woman, we worked together for 33 years. We helped each other in work and were friends of our families.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“My daughter often comes to me, brings food, prepares food for me, reads interesting articles on the computer. I often meet with my sister, who also lives in San Diego. My grandson is already married and has a good relationship with me. I have a niece; she also sometimes comes to me and I really like to communicate with her. In the normal situation that existed before the coronavirus pandemic, I went to Adult Day Care Center in San Diego every day. We were constantly visited by social workers, who helped solve problems with paying various bills, visiting doctors, or ordering the necessary transportation. Now Jewish Family Service is also giving me the help I need.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“I spent my childhood in the besieged Leningrad. I saw many people who died from hunger and cold, my loved ones died before my eyes. Each new day was worse than the previous one. In ordinary words, it is impossible to describe human suffering during the siege of Leningrad. Until now, the memories of the war cause me pain and tears. The war greatly influenced me, I learned not to pay attention to trifles and to value a more peaceful life.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"The coronavirus quarantine has greatly affected my life. I can no longer meet much with my relatives and friends. Sometimes I go outside and walk near the house. My daughter constantly comes to me, brings the necessary things interesting articles to me from the computer. I do not watch TV because of eye problems. Communication with my daughter is very supportive and helps me."



*Sofia with her husband*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"The greatest luck in my life is that I came to America and live here. Before leaving, my husband fell seriously ill, he had a massive heart attack. We were even afraid to fly by plane. But after arriving in the United States, we immediately received excellent medical care, financial assistance, an inexpensive apartment, and life gradually improved. My husband lived in America for 15 years."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"My main thing I value is my family, my daughter and grandson. Also, very important to me is my best friend Zhenya, who lives in New York. We became friends at school in besieged Leningrad and have been friends for over 75 years."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"I think that we are very far behind young people in modern life. They know and can do much more than we do, and the world is open to them. Young people do not need our advice and I would only like to wish them to maintain respect for the older generation."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Harry Rosen**



*Harry at home in San Diego, age 97*

## **Short Biography:**

Harry Rosen and his family escaped Germany by pretending they were going on a picnic one day. The year was 1935, and the Nazis had been in power for two years. Soldiers had already shut down the family's home goods store and closed the schools to Jewish children. Harry's father, wanted by the Gestapo for having insulted Hitler, had fled to Belgium to escape being deported to Dachau. The rest of the family – Harry's mother and three siblings – paid a smuggler to get them across the

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

German/Belgium border. “We packed our backpacks and told the neighbors we were going on a picnic,” recalled Harry. “I was 12 years old.”

The family reunited in Brussels, where the Jewish community helped it survive. A year later the Rosens emigrated to Palestine, where Harry’s father found work picking oranges. Later on, he worked in construction. Money was always tight; Harry helped out by working after school in a grocery store. “I never had a childhood,” he said. As an adult, Harry served in the army, fighting in the 1948 War, and then as a policeman for 10 years. In 1949 he met his wife Fanny, a concentration camp survivor from Romania. They married, had two sons, and moved to San Diego in 1962. Harry began working in the airplane construction industry. Like many Holocaust Survivors, Harry and his wife were haunted for years by their memories of the Nazis. Fanny Rosen, now deceased, suffered from severe depression. Harry vividly recalls when the SS came his house to pick up his father. “We shivered when they banged on the door,” he says. “But my father was already hiding in our landlord’s attic.”

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**  
“I grew up in the city so we played in the street. Games like marbles. But I was not a happy child. Part of that had to do with being insecure. But also growing up in Germany.”
- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**  
“To be independent.”
- **What do you enjoy? How do you like to spend your time?**  
“Reading. I read in three languages: German, Hebrew, and Yiddish.”
- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**  
“Sharing: food, money, whatever I have.”



*Harry with his mother, wife, and son Avi*

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**  
“If I were hopeless, I would not be here.”
- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
“I like to be around people. I’m very social. But now, since COVID-19, every day is the same. I’m tired of being alone.”
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
“I get calls from friends. Anyone who cares about my wellbeing is my friend.”
- **What are you currently doing independently?**  
“Everything. I can prepare my own meals; Jewish Family Service delivers them to me. I don’t drive anymore, so people shop for me. I walk just fine with my walker.”
- **Tell me something you are really proud of.**  
“I did not get a lot of schooling but now, in my senior years, I fit in with people who are professionals. I call it street smarts, which comes from my life experience, hardship, and reading a lot of books.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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*Harry and his wife Fanny*

- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“I play on my Facebook. I speak to people in four different languages: English, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish.”
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“Be positive. Don’t see everything in black. There is always sunshine in the sky. You should never forget your past but don’t dwell on it.”



- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"The Internet. Jewish Family Service. My neighbors. I sit outside for an hour each day and talk. We help each other."

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

"I did not get a lot of schooling because of the Holocaust. The year I spent in Belgium we lived in cheap hotels. I went to school but the kids beat us up because we were German so I didn't want to go. In Palestine we had to pay the British for schooling. I was working during the day, delivering groceries to housewives, and going to school at night. I was too tired to learn much."

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

"Because of our situation, my father did not know how to give love. His own mother died from a tooth infection when he was seven years old. It was very bad for the children."

*Harry's son Amnon in Israel*

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"My neighbors. But I don't have many friends. Just friendly people. I'm not a loner but I'm alone."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"I've been adopted into some families, like a grandfather. When a child is born, or someone is married, I get a call. I'm part of it. Before the coronavirus, I was present on Friday nights at people's homes."

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

"I take care of myself. I prep all my own meals. People shop for me and I get help from Jewish Family Service."

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?"**

I understand the world better now. People are driven by envy and hate. The Germans were one of the most culturally advanced people in the world. So what happened there can happen anywhere."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I'm on the computer a lot. I participate in Zoom sessions every week, on current events and trivia. I have many people I stay in contact with. I also play solitaire. Music brings me joy. I watch TV, and I participate in game shows like Family Feud and Wheel of Fortune. I never watch tragic shows."



*Harry with his sister (left) and wife*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"I was not very lucky in my life. I lost a son in a freak accident when he was a teenager. I'm not sure I know what luck is. Luck to me is winning the lottery. I'm fortunate that I'm still alive."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I can make my own decisions."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"To love each other. To forgive. To make peace. Without love, you are finished."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Alla Rosenstein**



*Alla Rosenstein, age 88*

## **Short Biography:**

“I was nine years old when the Germans began closing in on Odessa. The year was 1941. My father was in the army, so he was able to get a truck and take the family to a village not far from Odessa to escape the bombing. It was my mother, my brother, my grandparents, and my uncle, who was 16 years old at the time. We brought two suitcases each. It was freezing cold and we had nothing to eat. We would find potato peels, wash them off, and make soup out of them. When my uncle turned 17, they took him into the army, and he was killed in the war.

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

"In 1945 my father came back from the front and we returned to Odessa. All the Jews were gone. My great-grandmother was shot in the street. Everybody who stayed there was killed. They killed my mother's sisters and nephews.

"We didn't get our apartment back because someone else had moved in and kept all our furniture. When the Germans left, they took everything. They cleaned out the stores. My father could not find a job. That was the starvation year.

"The Communists didn't kill the Jews, but they did discriminate. Only 1% would get into college. Jews could not get the good jobs. I worked in a flour mill and met my husband David when I was 19 years old. He was a mechanical engineer and designer. We had two boys. After I was married, I had to stand in line for chicken, eggs, butter ...almost everything. You couldn't plan dinner. You just got in line if you saw one. But we were used to it.

"We left Russia in 1973, when my sons were ages 17 and nine. We lived in Israel for seven months, but my husband could not find a job. In the U.S., the first place we settled was Minneapolis; we were the first Russian Jews to come to the Jewish Federation. We lived six years in Minneapolis and six years in San Jose. Then my husband retired after a severe heart attack. He died in 2007.

My oldest son is now an orthopedic surgeon in Hawaii. My youngest graduated from law school and lives in San Diego. I have five grandchildren."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"My father was very strict, so we were very quiet and disciplined children. I did well in school."



*Alla, age 3, with her parents*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"I learned to appreciate every little thing that anyone does for me. And I love Jewishness."

- **What do you enjoy?**  
“I like to read, watch TV, play solitaire on the computer, go out with friends. Some of them belong to Chabad.”
- **How do you like to spend your time?**  
“Walking on the beach. I like movies, but not ones with the shouting and slipping into bed or killing each other.”
- **What is something that your friends and family would say you’re great at?**  
“Cooking. Helping people.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**  
“I wanted to change my life, to better it. Also, the lives of my children. That’s why I left Russia. I wanted to see the future and the future of my children.”
- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
“When I don’t have any pain. When I don’t have to go to the doctor’s office. When I can see my children and grandchildren.”
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
“I have very good friends, American friends, and they call me. In Minnesota I belonged to a synagogue. Here I belong to Beth El but now I go to Chabad. even though it is too religious for me.”
- **What are you currently doing independently?**  
“Everything but driving. I take a bus everywhere: shopping, doctor appointments, and to see friends. I’ve never driven. My husband did all the driving, and after he died it was too late to learn and too expensive to have a car.”
- **Tell me something you are really proud of.**  
“My children. They worked very hard to graduate from college. I’m also proud of coming here and starting a new life from scratch.”



*Alla with her husband David*



### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“Being outside. But I also enjoy being inside my house.”
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“You have to appreciate every minute and be very strong. Everyone tells me I’m very strong. But I had to be.”
- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**  
“I left Russia and settled into a new life. I taught my children the value of hard work and helped them get a good education.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“My sons. But I try to be self-sufficient.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“If it weren’t for the Germans, I could have gotten a better education and studied music.”



*Alla at age 3*

### 4. Connections-Friends, Family and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“My family was very hardworking and honest. They believed in socialism because they grew up with it and they didn’t know any better.”
- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“My children and my grandchildren. They help me financially and physically.”



*Alla with her husband and sons in 1973, while emigrating to Israel*

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**  
“I worry about them and I help them with suggestions.”
- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
“My youngest son helps me with paperwork and forms. He takes me shopping or moves heavy things for me. My oldest son helps me with big bills. My grandchildren call me and talk to me. My oldest son bought me an Alexa so we can see and each other and talk together.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
I understand the world better because of the Holocaust. I know about Nazis and fascism and how cruel they can be. I don't trust the Germans.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**  
“I like music and movies. I watch Russian movies and old American movies on my computer, on YouTube. I read a lot, not in Russian, but in English. I like romances. But I'm not reading as much as I used to. I don't have the patience.”
- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**  
“Yes, I believe in luck. But my good luck has been with my children and not for myself. In October I'll be 88 years old. My breast cancer has returned after eight years. It spread in my chest. Close to my lungs. I've had very strong chemo for five years now. It does bad stuff to your insides.”
- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**  
“My health. My independence. My children and grandchildren. Without them, I don't know if I want to live.”
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
“Help others. Be understanding. Be sensitive.”



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Asya Ryzhik**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1940 in the city of Kharkov, Ukraine. At the beginning of the war in 1941, my mother and I were evacuated to the city of Shymkent in Kazakhstan. My father was not taken into the army due to illness. He worked at a factory in Stalingrad. In 1944, we returned to Kharkov. Almost the whole city was destroyed. We lived in the same apartment with several more neighbors. When my mother's sister died, my parents took her little son in with us, since his father also had died in the war. In 1946, my brother was born, and we lived in a small room of five people:

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster

parents, two brothers and me. In 1947, I went to school, and after the 7th grade I entered a technical school. I worked at the machine-tool plant in the department of technical control. From 1963 to 1969 I studied at the Kharkov Polytechnic Institute. I worked at the Design Institute in the design bureau. Two years after the start of work, I became seriously ill and could not work for a whole year. In 1971 I got married. In 1989, our family emigrated to America. For 17 years we lived in New York, and in 2006 we moved to San Diego. I have a daughter, grandson, and granddaughter. My daughter works as a psychologist in San Diego.”

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“My childhood was very difficult. As a very young child, I was evacuated to Kazakhstan. After one very difficult transition, I could not walk for half a year. From the evacuation we returned to the dilapidated Kharkov. I remember that we lived in an apartment with several more families. One of the neighbors was a very rude man;



*Young Years*

all the time he played cards in the shared kitchen and smoked a lot. I really enjoyed reading. My mother worked in the library and many interesting books were available to me. As a child, I acted like a boy and was not afraid of anything. One day, my mother saw me sitting on a 4<sup>th</sup> floor windowsill, legs hanging down, and she was very scared. I studied well, but my parents were often called to school because of my bad behavior. I was teased for being a Jewess and sometimes I even had to fight.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“In the Soviet Union, especially in Ukraine, there was strong state and domestic anti-Semitism. Almost nothing was written or said about the Jews who fought in battles against the Nazis during World War II, the Holocaust. From the stories of the few people who survived the Holocaust, we heard about the ghetto, extermination camps and the massacres of Jews during the war. Almost all my relatives were evacuated from Ukraine, and those who did not have time and remained all died. Under Soviet rule, mass graves of Nazi victims were often built up with new houses. I believe that it is necessary to tell the young generation about the terrible fate of the Jews during the years of World War II. For more than 3,000 years, Jews have been persecuted: Rome, Spain, England, Germany, the Soviet Union. If you do not know the history and do not fight anti-Semitism in time, the Holocaust may happen again.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I have been always involved in sports, I loved playing volleyball and table tennis. As a child, I went to dance and ballet classes, did gymnastics and aerobics. In winter I went skiing, together with my husband we went skiing in the Carpathians, Ukraine. When I lived in New York, I began to study yoga and performed various exercises on a par with young people. My main hobby has always been books. I loved to read French historical novels, I really liked Feuchtwanger, Remarque, Zweig, Hailey. Now I continue to read books, but not so much as before."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"My day always starts with morning exercises, for 45 minutes I do various yoga exercises as I am able. After breakfast, I walk in the park for almost an hour, sometimes feeding rabbits. At home, I read, watch the Fox news channel on TV, watch American news from the Internet. I rarely watch Russian and American films and TV shows. Recently, I became interested in the history of the United States and sometimes I read books in English."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

"My husband and daughter note and appreciate my activity and interest in life. I tried to cultivate this in my daughter. I took her to music, drawing, gymnastics, tennis, chess and tried to provide the maximum opportunities for doing interesting things."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"Good family relationships with a husband, daughter and grandchildren are the main conditions for a normal life. My husband and I raised our grandchildren from birth. My daughter brought them in the morning, went to work, and took them home in the evening. Now the grandson and granddaughter have grown up, the daughter no longer needs our daily help in raising children, but we try to meet and maintain good relations whenever possible. It gives me hope for a calm and stable future."



*Asya and Naum at their daughter's wedding*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"If everyone in my family is healthy, then the day is already good, and I can safely do household chores. In the morning, almost an hour I do exercises, in the afternoon I go out and walk around the house. Sometimes with my husband we go to the ocean."



At home I like to bake various pies, cakes, and pastries. I also bake gluten free homemade bread for my husband and me. I am very pleased when my culinary products turn out to be tasty, this creates me a good mood for the whole day.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“I am a very emotional person, but I try to prevent my emotions from reflecting on people close to me. I believe that everything that happens to me depends only on me and I am responsible for my life. When we moved from the Soviet Union to America and first lived in New York, I worked on any job, cleaned apartments, took care of babies, took care of children in a Jewish Yeshiva (school). It was necessary to earn a living, return money to the organization HIAS, which gave us the initial loan, and in addition, learn English. A sense of responsibility for my family always helped me.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I try to do everything by myself. I cook food for our family, I clean up our apartment with my husband, I use basic computer applications such as E-mail, Google, You Tube, and others.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“The smartest and most correct decision in my life was to leave the Soviet Union for America in 1989. It was my initiative - my brother and mother did not want to leave for various reasons including age and illness. I was able to convince everyone, because it was impossible for us to remain in anti-Semitic Kharkov. When we lived in Italy in a temporary emigrant camp, mom felt bad and we called a doctor. Seeing the Soviet medicines that my mother had, the doctor said that she simply could not take them and prescribed others. Mom began to feel better and lived with us in America until 2001.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I like to bake all kinds of pies and cakes. Nowadays it is easy to find any recipe on the Internet and I try to bake something new and tasty for my family. My last items are gluten-free cornbread and apple pie - charlotte. I want to be in good physical shape and do exercises even some yoga exercises every morning. Once, when my grandson was little, he ran away from me on the street, but I caught up with him and he said,



*Winter vacation*

‘Grandma, you run like a young woman’. It was very pleasant for me to hear that. I like to read books, now I re-read the classics, which are perceived differently with age. My favorite writers: Babel, Bulgakov, Feuchtwanger.”

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“I had a responsible job in the Design Bureau, communicated with many people and my communication skills always helped me. I quickly get along with people, but sometimes I am disappointed in them. People often make their own life difficult and look for non-existent problems. At the beginning of our emigration, even without a good knowledge of English, I tried to communicate with Americans. I think that benevolence, a desire to avoid conflicts and find a common language will always give a good result in communicating with different people.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“I love America and this feeling helps me and makes my life easier. I have a good relationship with my daughter and grandchildren, although we do not see each other very often now. My grandchildren always correct my English, but in disputes I think that it is always my fault, not the children’s. I am very friendly with my brother’s wife, she is fourteen years younger than me, but we are like sisters. She works as a designer, sends me fashionable clothes, and does not even want to take money.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

The smartest thing that I have done in my life is the move of our whole family to America. It was completely my initiative, I was able to convince everyone of the need for such a step, but the practical implementation was by the merit of my husband. I got married at 30, and soon we should have a golden wedding.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“The main reason for our move to the United States was strong anti-Semitism in Ukraine. In the school where my daughter studied, Jewish children were often teased and even sometimes beaten. My childhood was also poisoned by anti-Semitism and I did not want this to affect the fate of my daughter. At work, I heard constant remarks and statements against Jews, maybe not personally against me, but it was simply impossible to listen to this. In 1989, our family emigrated to the United States.”

## 4. Connections-Friends, Family, and the World

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*Asya and her Family*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“Our family lived in a workers' village where there were strong anti-Semitic sentiments; because of this, my brothers and even I had to sometimes fight with other children. At home we spoke Yiddish, but on the street, I asked my parents to speak Russian, because I was afraid that the neighbors would hear our Jewish language. My parents thought that I did not understand Yiddish, but even then, I understood a lot. My mother was born in Ukraine, she was very friendly and cheerful, loved to sing and knew a lot of Ukrainian songs. My mother's parents - my grandparents - were killed during the Jewish pogrom, and a Ukrainian woman hid her. Fortunately, the Cossack pogromists did not find my mother and she survived. My father worked as an engineer in a printing house. He was a man who acutely felt injustice, everywhere he looked for the truth; therefore, he was often fired from his job. Some of our relatives from our mother's side left for America in the 1920s. Once we received a package from them, but my mother did not even go to the post office to receive it, because she was afraid that we would get into trouble because of our relatives in America.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“In the technical school where I studied there was one girl with whom I became friends. She was an orphan and was raised by her aunt - a very interesting and intelligent woman. The woman's husband was shot in 1937 during the Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union. When Stalin died in 1953, political prisoners began to get free from prisons and camps. In my friend's house, I often saw such people and heard their interesting and very sad stories about life in Soviet concentration camps. These stories made an indelible impression on me.

In my youth, I had a friend named Tanya, she was a very well-read and musically educated girl. Once, when we were on a collective farm, I heard Tanya croon beautiful melodies of classical music. I asked, ‘What is she singing?’ and Tanya said that these are Mozart's melodies. I became interested and since then became interested in classical music.

Of course, my parents have had the greatest influence on me. Mom supervised my upbringing, she worked in the library and I had the rare opportunity to read any interesting books. Once at my friends' house I met a wonderful person, his name was

Mark Azov and he worked with Arkady Raikin. Mark told many funny stories about Raikin.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“Together with my husband, I was engaged in water tourism, we have traveled almost all over Ukraine and the Baltic states. During our trips, I met various interesting people, learned a lot from them, and they learned from me. At an early age, we took our daughter on hikes. I have an excellent relationship with my brother's wife, she is much younger than me, but we are very friendly with her.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

- “My main support in life is my husband and daughter. At the beginning of our emigration, when we lived in Italy, the HIAS organization helped us emotionally and financially, especially after my husband had a serious bicycle accident. They helped us to rent an inexpensive apartment, and later buy tickets to America. Jewish Family Service cares for us and other elderly people. For a while we worked at JFS as volunteers. JFS arranges meetings with interesting people, organizes celebrations of Jewish holidays and gives gifts, helps buy tickets for shows and concerts, delivers necessary food to those in need, provides helpful information about life in America and helps with many other serious and important matters.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“In no case should the Holocaust be forgotten. It is necessary to continue writing books, making films so that people know about this terrible phenomenon. It is necessary to pay attention to any manifestations of anti-Semitism in the world and to fight against them.

“It is very important to think with your own head, not to take any news from the Internet on faith, to be interested in different sources of news. We also need to know the rich and tragic history of our Jewish nation.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“I subscribe to a magazine in Russian from New York, the magazine is called ‘Interesting’ and comes



*Asya and her husband Naum*

twice a month. I enjoy reading interesting articles on historical, political, and popular science topics. On my computer, I listen to the San Diego news in English. I rarely watch TV, I watch mostly historical films, such as 'Ekaterina' or programs about the art of Edward Radzinsky and Mikhail Kazinnik. Sometimes I watch my favorite operas or musical performances. In these latter months, due to quarantine, we have not met with our close relatives, but every communication with my daughter and grandchildren and telephone conversations with my brother and his family, who live in New York, charges me with good energy and give me hope that everything will be good."

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"Luck is not a 'permanent lady', and to achieve her favor, you need to work hard and strive for her. I am sure that the main success of my life is my family. My husband and I together raised a wonderful daughter and grandchildren. But it did not come by itself; we have invested a lot of effort and money in education. We tried to make our daughter an educated and versatile person and our efforts and expectations were met."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"Love for your family, decency in relations with all people, courage in any life situations - these are human qualities that I value. Life is very difficult, and you constantly must overcome difficulties and obstacles while maintaining honesty and not changing your beliefs. You need to live so that after your actions your conscience does not torment you. Harmony between the inner and outer world of a person is also important."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

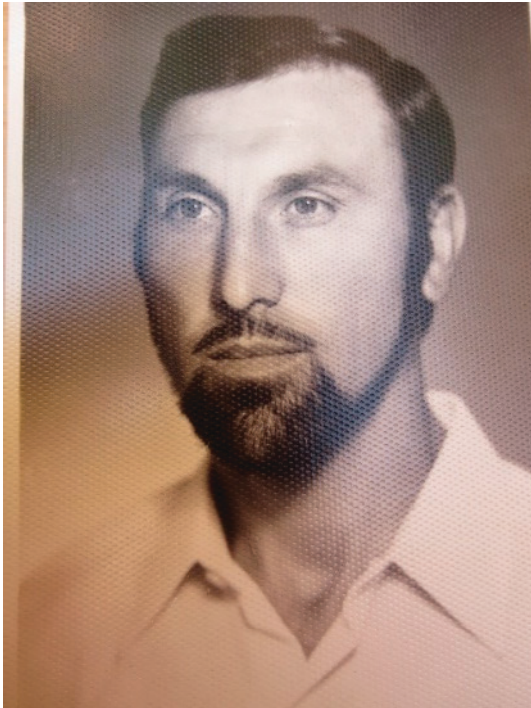
"I would like my grandson and granddaughter to find their favorite profession and job. You need to have hobbies in life, such as sports, music, books. But most importantly, you must love your family, maintain respectful, sincere, and friendly relationships with people, defend your beliefs and admit your mistakes. It is sometimes helpful to listen to the advice of your elders, especially your parents, and consider their interests and opinions."



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Naum Ryzhik**



## **Short biography:**

"I was born in 1936 in the city of Kharkov, Ukraine. In 1941, at the beginning of the war with the Nazis, my father went to the front. In 1942, he died near Leningrad. In 1941, my mother and I were evacuated to the city of Shymkent Kazakhstan. In 1947, we returned to Kharkov. After graduation, I entered college. After graduating from college in 1955, I was drafted into the Soviet army. I served in the army for three years in Belarus and Moscow in a special service battalion of the Ministry of Defense. After serving in the army, I returned to Kharkov. I studied and graduated from Kharkov Mechanical Institute. Then I worked as a foreman at the mechanic department. In 1964 I went to work at the Electric Bulb Factory in the design bureau. In 1969 I began to work at the Design Institute, and in 1975 moved to the Repair and Construction department as the chief mechanic. In 1989, our family emigrated to America. For 17 years we lived in New York, and in 2006 we moved to San Diego. I have one daughter, grandson, and granddaughter".

Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster

# 1. Looking at Myself

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*Ski Resort Mount. High 800f*

- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“When my father went to the front, I was just a child. I remember that I was standing with a wooden rifle and pretended to shoot at German planes. Our family was evacuated to the city of Chimkent in Uzbekistan. I remember the muddy *aryks* (small streams) and delicious hot bread. In 1947, we returned to Kharkov. My father died in the war and there were many children in our school whose fathers died in the war also. Only boys studied in the classroom. We played soccer, just hung around the street, clung to cars. Sometimes I was teased because I am a Jew, so I had to fight back. At an older age I became interested in aircraft modeling. My friend and I made shows with airplane models. We even built gliders with gas engines. At that time, I lived with my mother and grandmother in the basement in one small room without a toilet. We lived like this for 10 years. Mom worked day and night and died early. When I was drafted into the army at age 18, I even was glad that I had escaped from such a life.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“In the Soviet Union, especially in Ukraine, the Holocaust theme was hushed up and hidden in every way. Sometimes in books and memoirs there were facts about persecution and massacres of Jews during the years of World War II. In Kharkov, where we lived, anti-Semitism was very strong. At school as a Jew, I was teased. Once on the fence in large black letters someone wrote ‘Naum Ryzhik-Jew’. At the end of the 80s, it became impossible for our family to stay in Kharkov. As soon as we moved to America, we began to learn more about the terrible life and death of Jews in ghettos and concentration camps. Our daughter in the 10th grade of an American school wrote an essay on the Holocaust and even received a cash prize for excellent work. We need to continue talking, explaining, writing books, and making films so that people know the causes, facts, and the terrible consequences of anti-Semitism.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“My main hobby in my youth was water tourism. I was a member of the national team of Ukraine and we had to go through the impregnable and treacherous mountain river Kyzyl Kham. Our team successfully made this difficult trip and won the title ‘Master of Sports’. In the 60s, at the Ukrainian Championship in kayaking and rafting, I was

lucky to see and hear the famous bards: Vizbor, Klyachkin, Kukin. I participated in kayaking competitions on very difficult and dangerous rivers in Saiyan, Tuva, Kola Peninsula. Once, we ran into a huge bear and were barely able to escape and sail down the river in a boat.

“While living in America, I continued to engage in tourism, even organized the Azimuth tourist club in New York. We supported the bard movement, invited popular Russian bards with concerts. Having moved to California, I tried to continue my tourist activities, organized the ‘Weekend Club’. We went to various interesting natural places, for example, I remember trips to the Hot Springs.”

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

“I always try to do something and be busy. Every day in the morning and evening, I ride my bike about 24 miles (38 kilometers) per day. It strengthens my physical condition and improves my mood. At home I am interested in various news in America and in the world. I like to listen to Chicago radio in Russian, which provides objective and useful information. Sometimes I make small repairs at home and enjoy my own photographic and music collections.”

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

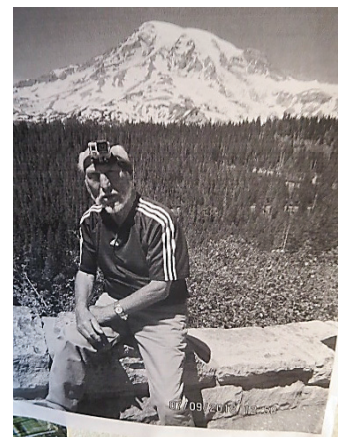
“My wife and friends say that I am a very intuitive people - person. I feel when people need me, and I am always ready to help them. I am social and like to help other people be social with each other. I like to unite people according to their various interests, and organized walks and bus trips to nature, concerts, competitions. I am not afraid to do something new for myself, for example, I independently mastered the repair of electronic equipment for our concerts.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

“By my nature I am a very curious person, I constantly want to learn something new and teach other people. I always liked extreme sports, I was engaged in water tourism on mountain rivers and went skiing. I love helping people and I am very happy when my help gives a positive result. I have been maintaining this lifestyle for many years and it gives me strength and hope for a good future. My age is not a physical state, these are just numbers, the main thing is a state of mind.”



*The rest after a hard day*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"I plan my time and cannot allow myself to waste time. In the evening, I think about what to do tomorrow. For me, the best times are traveling to the countryside, talking with nice people, a bonfire, and songs with a guitar."

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

"Each person in life has a hard time, difficult situations and moments. I always tried not to lose my head, not to give in to panic, to keep calm and inspire calmness to other people. I believe that the good always comes after the bad and I do not like people who whine and complain all the time. When we lived in Italy in a temporary transit camp at the beginning of our emigration, there were people unhappy with everything, who constantly complained and said that there was no light in life. Then in America in New York I met these people, they found work, bought houses, life got better, and they forgot about their complaints."

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

"I try to do everything on my own. Together with my wife, we do all the household chores. Every day I take bike trips and try to arrange walking and bus excursions for other people."

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

"I have a good friend who now lives in Florida. Once upon a time he was fired and for a long time he could not find a new job, he lost faith in himself, fell into a depression and 'rolled down'. I began to help him find a job, gave him my tools, came to his house and we did his work together. In the end, he found a new job and life returned to normal. When we are talking with him now, he calls me his teacher and says that I just saved him at that time. I am very proud of it."

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"I always loved extreme sports, but most of all I liked water tourism. I was a member of the national team of Ukraine and participated in competitions passing difficult sections of various mountain rivers in kayaks and rafts. When I got older and could no longer engage in such a dangerous sport, I continued to participate in long-distance hiking and skiing."

*Water trip (Naum is on left)*

Arriving in America, I arranged concerts of popular Russian bards, bus excursions, and evenings of music on Jewish holidays.”

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

“My father died in the war and my mother to somehow support my family had to work very hard. I, like thousands of other post-war children in the Soviet Union, grew up without a father. Life was hard both materially and emotionally. After college, I joined the army. In the Ukraine, it was very difficult for Jews to go to college, find a good job and have a career; anti-Semitism was at the State and domestic level. At work, it was necessary to constantly prove your knowledge and skills not only were appropriate to your position, but even much better than other employees. During my career, I changed jobs several times and everywhere this struggle continued. This peculiar survival experience was very useful to me when I emigrated to America. Despite a poor knowledge of English, I looked for any job and was not afraid to take on completely new types of work for me. Now I no longer work, but I try and continue to lead an active lifestyle, with long-distance cycling, organizing various events, and participation in social networks.”

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

“In terms of my character, I easily fit into any company and try to be a leader; these qualities were manifested in my school and in the army. I believe that I can adapt well to different life situations and meet the changing circumstances. I do not like laziness and still try to work as much as possible.”

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

“After completing military service, I returned to Kharkov, worked, studied at the institute, and got married. Life was relatively well established, but I always wanted something new and interesting. I took up one of the most difficult types of water tourism - kayaking and rafting on mountain rivers. In this often-dangerous sport, I achieved certain successes and received the honorary title ‘Master of Sports’. Once in Karelia the kayak rolled over with me, everyone thought that I had already died, but I managed to get out and continue the hike. I am glad that I could overcome very difficult obstacles and achieve my goals. I am proud that I was never afraid of any work and helped people in any situation.”

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“During the war, I was a child and experienced all the hardships of evacuation and the post-war period. This hard life tempered me and helped me overcome difficult circumstances in the future. Together with my family, I was able to leave the Ukraine and start a new and, I believe, a worthy life in America.”



## 4. Connections- Friends, Family, and the World

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*Naum with his Family*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“My grandfather was a religious person, he observed Jewish traditions, and talked to my grandmother in Yiddish. When I was 11 years old, I accidentally saw my uncle dressed in *tallis* (Jewish religious shawl). My family had to hide our religiosity, my grandfather and uncle prayed in secret, and I was ashamed to ask them questions. My grandmother was almost blind and could not read anything herself. At the beginning of the war, my father went to the front and died in battle against the Nazis. Father's brother helped our family to evacuate from Kharkov. My cousin, who lives in Philadelphia, studied our family history. From her I learned that my uncle Solomon had a small shop selling wine, and uncle Kolya had a manufacturing shop. There was a pastry shop not far from our house, and sometimes I bought myself cakes with the money my mother gave me for lunch at school.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“When I served in the Soviet Army, we had a battalion commander, a major, who once helped me a lot. I respected him very much, because, unlike most other commanders, he was an honest and just man. In Kharkov, I had a friend named Boris, I remember that we often played chess together. Now, unfortunately, I have no connection with him. While working in Kharkov, I maintained normal relations with my colleagues and tried to get along with everyone. I had three bosses, but I respected only one of them, since he was not an anti-Semite and treated all people equally.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“I have always appreciated smart and hardworking people and absolutely could not stand laziness, envy, and indifference. As I have already said, once during a water trip in Karelia, our kayak turned over on a dangerous section of the river, but I managed to get out and save my partner. In America, I have a friend who could not find a job for a long time and became depressed. I helped him find and manage a new job. His life got better; he still thanks me for that.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“My wife and I were the first of our relatives to come to America, so we did not have much help at the beginning of our emigration. When we moved to San Diego, we became involved in various activities of the Jewish Family Service. We receive food packages, birthday, and holiday gifts. In the past, I helped conduct various meetings at JFS and hopefully this will continue after the coronavirus situation improves.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

"I fear that the rise of anti-Semitism, impunity, and irresponsibility could lead to dire consequences throughout the world and even America, as has happened more than once in history. Jews are again beginning to be accused of various human problems, one cannot pass by this calmly and not pay attention to anti-Semitic statements and speeches."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"Cycling energizes me, empowers me, and improves my mood. Every day I ride 24 miles (38 kilometers). Movement is life, and life continues despite all the difficulties."



*In the Soviet Army*

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"Once, at the beginning of emigration, when we lived in Italy, we were told that we would not receive refugee status and would not be able to leave for America. Suddenly, on my birthday, we were summoned to the Joint (Jewish organization) and received all the permission to leave. It was the best birthday present ever. Also, in Italy I had a car accident, I was lucky; I was not badly hurt and was even lent money to pay for the costs of the accident."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I like in people: openness, sincerity in relationships, frankness, a desire to help in difficult situations. I can find a common language with everyone and maintain good relations. If someone fails, but the person tries, I am always ready to help. But if a person is lazy, blames others for everything, and he himself does not want to do anything; I have no desire to communicate with him."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"The interests of modern young people in many ways do not coincide with ours, it is difficult for us to interest them in something. They read little books, mostly watch tablets and smartphones. In life, you need to have a good hobby, that improves and decorates our often-boring life. You also need to know the history and traditions of your people."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Salomon Schlosser**



*Salomon, age 95*

Interviewed by Brae Canlen

# Short Biography:

"I grew up in an Orthodox Jewish community in Lodz, Poland, selling onions before school to help my family, unaware of how my life would change dramatically starting in 1939. That's when the Nazis invaded Poland and I was relocated into the Lodz ghetto. After that came a harrowing train ride to Auschwitz, the 'March of Death' through the snow to Mauthausen and starvation.

"But I survived it all, and at the age of 21, arrived at the Ebensee concentration camp in Austria. The war was drawing to a close, and the U.S. Army arrived soon after and liberated the camp. But the rest of my family was not so lucky. My mother and two sisters were poisoned by the Nazis with carbon monoxide. My father died of starvation. An older brother was drafted into the Soviet Army but killed in action. Only my older brother Yankl survived the war; he lived into his '80s in Israel.

"I weighed 70 pounds when I entered an Austrian refugee camp in 1945; it took four years to recover from typhus and regain my strength. In 1949, at the age of 25, I emigrated to the U.S., first to New York then to Miami. The Jewish Federation helped support me with \$27 a month. I went to school and worked odd jobs.

"In 1955, a matchmaker introduced me to my first wife, Clara. We married and moved to Mexico City, where we raised two children. I opened a hardware store called Coyote, which I operated for 20 years.

"Clara and I later divorced, and in 1975 I met Mana, the love of my life. We moved to Chula Vista, California in 2003 and lived there until Mana passed away in 2018.

"I still live in Chula Vista, and this year I celebrate my 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. I speak to children in schools about the Holocaust and I have co-authored a book called, "Mi Zeide es Historia."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"When I was young, we had a good life. At the age of seven I



*Salomon in Mexico  
after the war*

started to go to school. My father had wanted to send me to the yeshiva, but my mother sent me to the public school. I only did enough work to pass. I liked doing other things: playing football, hearing concerts in the park, going to the movies.”

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**  
“To stay alive. There were people in the camps who killed themselves, but I can’t tell you how they were different than me.”
- **What do you enjoy? How do you like to spend your time?**  
“I sleep. I watch television. I read magazines. I ask a lot of questions.”
- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**  
“When people come to me with problems, maybe I can help them. Problems with family, with children, with cooking. But I don’t give advice. I give recommendations.”

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**  
“Life itself. To stay alive.”
- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**



*Salomon holding photo of his family*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**  
“A good day is when the weather is nice. I like the climate here. A bad day is when anyone in my family is having a problem. That makes me unhappy.”
- **What helps you get through difficult times?**  
“I don’t dwell on the dead. I don’t go to the cemetery. I stay with the living. When someone tells me a story about my brother I say, ‘He’s dead. Dead is dead.’”
- **What are you currently doing independently?**  
“I walk with a walker. I have a caregiver who cooks for me. My wife’s daughter-in-law Haya does everything else.”
- **Tell me something you are really proud of.**  
“I’m alive. I’m 96 and I’m still talking.”



### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**  
“I like to relax. I enjoy doing nothing.”
- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“Don’t talk. Listen.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“California. The fruits. The food. The climate.”
- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**  
“If someone comes to me with a problem, and I can help them, it gives me a good feeling.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“When the war started, I was 15. A boy of 15 knows nothing.”

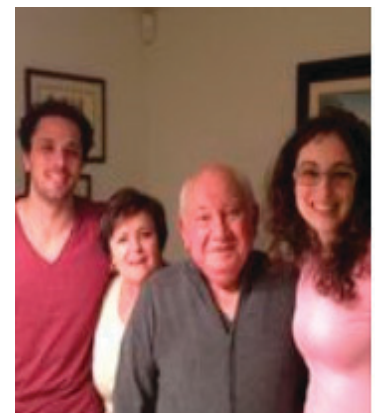


*Salomon's family in Poland before the war*

### 4. Connections-Friends, Family, and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“We had no family life. We were five children and very, very poor.”



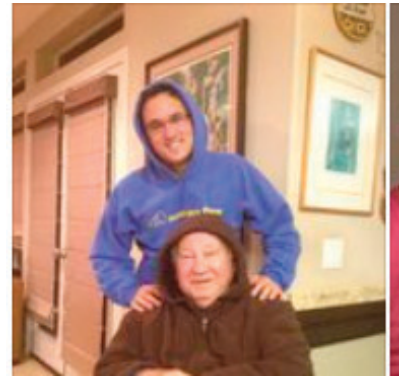
*Salomon with his family in San Diego*

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend? Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
 “I have Haya, my wife’s daughter-in-law, and her husband Moshe. Haya takes care of everything I need. Also, my caregiver Claudia. When my wife was alive, she took care of everything. In Mexico, we had maids and chauffeurs.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
 “I don’t spend a lot of time thinking about the Holocaust.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“Yes. I was lucky when I married my wife. When I went to Auschwitz, I was lucky to work inside, where I got soup and bread, sometimes a sweater or shoes. The guards were all criminals, but they worked outside, not inside.”



*Salomon with family in San Diego*

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**  
 “Life itself. I want to be alive. I don’t want to be dead.”
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
 “To be a good man. Not to criticize. And to listen to what people say to you.”

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Larisa Smotrich**



*Larisa in San Diego, 2019*

***Larisa Smotrich, 90 years old***

## **Short Biography:**

“I was born in Odessa, Ukraine on April 6, 1930. I was the only child. I had a normal, happy childhood. I was 11 years old when the war started, and our city was bombed. On June 22, 1941, we evacuated to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In 1945 we returned to Odessa. I went back to school and after I graduated, I wanted to study finance. So, I went to college and became an accountant. I got married in 1950 and my daughter was born in 1955 and then my son in 1960. I came to the U.S. in 1992 after my daughter. I have one granddaughter from my daughter and 2 granddaughters from my son. I have 2 great-grandchildren.”

Interviewed by Margarita Ferdman

# 1. Looking at Myself

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Larisa in Odessa, 1962

- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"I was very social with other kids who lived near me. We played games and had fun. Then I went to school and life seemed good. I was happy. Not shy. This was all before 1941. I would read poetry, memorize, and recite it. I loved Pushkin."

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"The Holocaust was a collective horror. There are bad people but always good people too who are willing to help during difficult times. I feel like the Holocaust made me a stronger person and helped me deal with difficulties in life better."

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I enjoy seeing my family successful and being around my friends. I enjoy reading and listening to books on tape."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"I like to go on walks in the morning when no one else is outside. I like to meet up with my neighbors for fresh air and have potlucks."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

"People would say that I am a great cook. I make great *cheburekee* (fried crescent shaped meat pies) and *pirozhki* (stuffed meat dumplings). For holidays people would request that I cook for them. I would always be the one to give toasts at parties because people seem to like what I have to say."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"In my life when times were difficult, I always believed it could be worse, so I tried to remain grateful and hopeful. It is relative. Keep in mind that others have it worse than you do."

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"Every morning I wake up to a phone call from my daughter to inquire about how I am doing and to check in with me. It sets up the rest of my day on a positive note. It is pleasant that someone cares about me and that I can rely and depend on them to care about me."

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

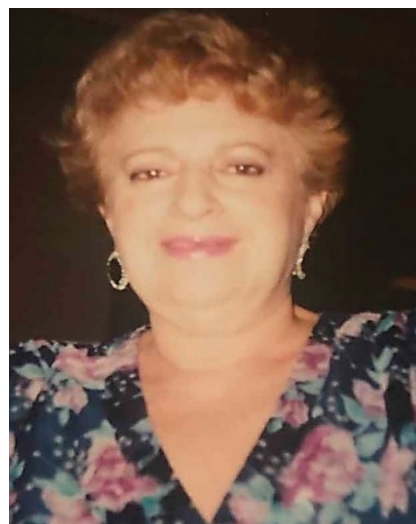
"I have a lot of friends who I confide in and get solutions for my problems for. I always have my family nearby to support me during any difficulties."

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

"I like to make things by hand. I can cook and make things to eat on my own, not as well as I used to but at least I am independent in that way."

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

"I am proud of my family when they are successful. I have 2 great grandchildren I am proud of. I am also proud of being a successful accountant."



*Larisa in San Diego, 2016*

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"When I am able to, I enjoy cooking and baking and making food for others. I also love to read and now I listen to books on tape through the New York Library of Congress. I get a lot of joy from reading literature."



*Larisa in 2017*



- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**  
“Surviving the war has made me a stronger person. Overcoming the most difficult years during the war has made it possible to deal with difficult times today.”
- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**  
“First, my family makes my life easier, followed by my friends. Interacting with people makes my life better.”
- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**  
“I am proud of my accomplishments at work; I was respected and did a lot to help people. I am most proud that I raised children who grew up to be good people.”
- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**  
“I lost a lot during the war and my education came to a halt. I also acquired a lot of health issues which affected my education after the war. Also, what I saw during the war has affected me for life.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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*Larisa with her husband Boris  
in Odessa, 1955*

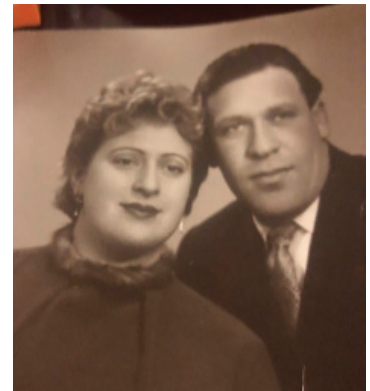
- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**  
“My parents taught me to work hard and to be a good person. They did everything they could to provide for me.”
- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“The closest person to me is my daughter. She calls me several times a day and visits me often. She brings me everything I need whenever I need it.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**  
“I do whatever I can for my loved ones. They come to me for advice and my perspective on things based on what I’ve lived through.”
- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
“My daughter. She helps me with anything I need: medical appointments, shopping, even giving me a haircut.”
- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**  
“I saw horrible things and it has affected how I see the world. I tend to hold on to things and reuse them because I lived through a time when we didn’t have much and needed to stretch things as far as we could.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**  
“I love people and being around family and friends.”
- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**  
“Yes, I believe in luck. For some people things pan out well, and for others it does not. But I always thank God for the good luck that I’ve had in my life.”
- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**  
“What matters most to be me is that the people around me are healthy, that there is peace in the world, and a cure for the virus.”
- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**  
“To find joy in your life, achieve what you can, work hard, and be a good person.”



*Larisa with her husband  
Boris in Odessa, 1960*

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Mila Tashlyk**



## Short Biography:

"I was born in 1937 in Kiev, Ukraine. My mother worked as an economist at the factory, and my father worked as a deputy director of the hotel. At the beginning of the war, my father went to the front, and in August 1941 my mother, grandmother and I were evacuated to the city of Tavda near Sverdlovsk. Father died in the war. For the entire time of the evacuation, we did not receive a single letter from him from the front. My second grandmother stayed in Kiev and died at the hands of the Nazis in Babi Yar. After the liberation of Ukraine from the Nazis, our family returned to Kiev. I went to school and in 1955, after graduation, I entered the Kiev Irrigation and Reclamation Institute. In 1957, I got married and continued my studies at the Kiev Construction Institute. After graduation, I worked at the Scientific Research Institute of Sanitary Engineering in Kiev. In 1992, our family emigrated to America. We arrived in San Diego, California. In 2001, my husband died. My son lives in Odessa, Ukraine. I have two grandchildren, one granddaughter, and a great-granddaughter."

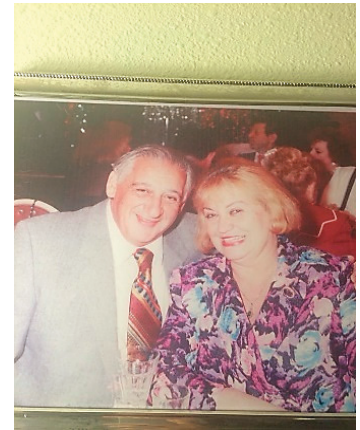
Interviewed and translated by Yakov Shuster`

# 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“At the beginning of the war with the Nazis, our family was evacuated to the small town of Tavda in the Sverdlovsk region. We were settled in a flight school. I, my mother, and my uncle and aunt lived in the same room. I recall large models of airplanes that I climbed into with other children. In the winter of 1945, my uncle and I returned to Kiev, and my mother stayed to work in Sverdlovsk at the Uralmash military plant. She arrived in Kiev a year later. In 1945, I went to school. At that time, schools were separate for boys and girls. There was a large yard near our house where I played with my friends. I studied well at school, I loved mathematics and literature. I loved to read; I remember that I read a lot of Jack London books. My best friend was a girl from a neighboring house. Her father was a professor. We continue to be friends till now. I do not remember the famines in those years. My mother worked, my uncle worked at the Ministry of Education, and my aunt was an excellent hostess. I was the only child in the family and enjoyed universal love.”



*Mila with her husband*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“In 1941, at the beginning of the war, my father went to the front. During the entire time we did not receive a single letter from him, and only in 1944 we received a notice that he had died. My second grandmother did not have time to evacuate from Kiev and died in Babi Yar. My cousin Leva at the age of 18 went to the front, was wounded, returned to duty, and died near Stalingrad. As a child, I heard stories about the mass deaths of Jews in Kiev during the Nazi occupation. In my childhood consciousness, the image of the German was preserved as the image of the enemy. In peacetime, state anti-Semitism remained in the Soviet Union; there was a quota of Jews who could be admitted to many institutions. In our house, we celebrated the Jewish holidays, but tried to do it quietly so that no one knew. My son and grandchildren know about the war and the Holocaust, they go to the synagogue for the holidays, my grandson is friends with the guys from Chabad. I believe that we need to know the history of Jewish nation and do everything so that the Holocaust does not happen again.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

“My biggest hobby is theater, at one time I even wanted to become an actress. As a child, I attended a theater club, loved to sing, and recite poetry. I still remember a lot of Russian songs. I even married the artist's son. In Kiev, we often went to the theater, especially tried to get to the performances of famous Moscow theaters. Kiev actors gathered in our house; I was familiar with the artists of the Moiseev dance

ensemble. Also, sometimes, there were good performances in San Diego; I liked the performances 'Fiddler on the Roof' and 'Cats'. I always loved to travel, often I went to my son in Odessa, Ukraine. Together with my son, we visited Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic and Israel."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"In the morning, after breakfast, I usually read various articles on a computer. I learn about the news in America through the Russian-language television channel 'Present'. I read articles about the history of the theater; I like to do erudition tests, now popular on the computer. Sometimes with my friend I walk along the ocean. Before, my friends and I went by car for different walks, we especially liked Coronado Beach. In the evening I like to watch old theater performances. Also, I am interested in contemporary movies and series about the lives of actors and artists. I liked the French movie 'Beautiful Era'.

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you are great at?**

"All my friends and relatives claim that my main attribute is the ability to be a friend and the desire to do good to people. Even now, during the quarantine associated with the coronavirus, I try to call my friends and share interesting and useful information. My granddaughter lives in Los Angeles, but she tells me, 'Grandma — you are my best friend.' Our family has always had friendly warm relations. My friends also note my wide purview and erudition and often turn to me for various tips."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"The main source of strength and hope for me is my family - my son and grandchildren. My son lives in Odessa, Ukraine, and before, I often went to him. My eldest grandson comes to me from New York, and my granddaughter lives in Los Angeles and I also love to meet and talk with her. Also, I have some good friends. Usually, we call each other and exchange various interesting information. Sometimes we gather in a small cafe, drink coffee, share our problems."



*Mila with her son*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"My son's morning call and a short conversation with him raise my mood for the whole day. I also call my son in Ukraine and always enjoy communicating with him. A



calm walk along the ocean or watching an interesting theatrical performance also creates the feeling of a good day.”

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

“In 2001, I lost my husband. It was very hard for me and my son took me to his home in Odessa, Ukraine. For some time, I lived in my son’s house, together we traveled to the Czech Republic in Karlovy Vary. The care of my son helped me a lot in those difficult days. Also, I was very supported by the family of my friend Vladimir Levinson.”

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

“I always tried to be busy with something; I studied English at City College, independently mastered the computer and new gadgets. I drive a car myself, sometimes make small repairs on a sewing machine or cook some dishes according to new recipes.”

- **Tell me something you are proud of.**

“I am proud of my son, grandsons, and granddaughter. My eldest grandson is a 3rd year student at Cornell University, receiving a scholarship and has already been offered a job. I am very pleased with my past work and career. Having started my career as an ordinary engineer, I was then able to defend my PhD thesis and for many years worked as a senior researcher. In my specialty, I flew a lot and traveled to different cities of the Soviet Union.”

## 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

“I really love the theater. In Kiev, we went to the Lesia Ukrainka Theater and the Musical Comedy Theater. When the famous Moscow theaters came to our city, I tried to not miss their performances, I especially remember the play ‘The Intervention’ of the Satire Theater, played by Anatoly Papanov, Andrei Mironov, and other wonderful actors. Now I do not have the opportunity to attend theatrical premieres, but I enjoy watching old performances on TV and on the computer. I love reading books, the last book that impressed me is the novel ‘Zuleika Opens Her Eyes’ by Russian writer Guzel Yakhina. Also, I watched a series on this novel, but I liked the book more. Recently,



*Mila at social event*

on the television channel Culture, I watched an old concert of Frank Sinatra's and enjoyed his voice and songs a lot."

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

"I always loved to communicate with people. Such qualities as contact, friendliness, sociability, the ability to be a friend have always helped me in the past and come in handy in America. I try to communicate with my neighbors, Russian-speaking and Americans, and, despite the difficulties with the language, I connect with many Americans."

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"Our family has always had love, respect for each other and mutual support. We always tried to apply these qualities to our son and grandchildren, and they respond this way to me. Support and warm relations with my son and grandchildren make my life easier and soothe me. I also have good friends and communicating with them helps me a lot."

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

"I am very proud of my son. He was an exemplary student at school, an excellent student at the institute, and made a good career. The fact that my son grew up as a worthy and kind person is the main achievement of my life."

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

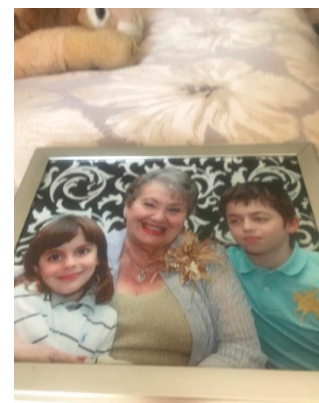
"I lived in the Soviet Union in Ukraine, where it was not easy for a woman, especially one of Jewish nationality to get to work, but despite this I was able to defend my dissertation, worked for a long time as a senior research fellow and gained respect and understanding from colleagues and superiors."

## 4. Connections-Friends, Family, and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

"As a child, I knew very little about my family. In 1941, my father went to war and died at the front, one grandmother was shot by the Nazis in Babi Yar. Mom and I lived in evacuation in the Ural, my mother worked a lot at the Uralmash military plant, and I hardly saw her.



*Mila and her grandsons*

After the war we returned to Kiev. My mother's sister raised me. She was a very kind and educated woman. Her son died in the war and all her motherly love passed to me. I still remember how she recited Pushkin's poems to me by heart. Father's sister, my aunt, also lived in Kiev and was a good and wise woman. I remember an interesting incident. My aunt received a one-room apartment in a good area of Kiev, and we came to visit her. The apartment had large windows, we wanted to give my aunt curtains, but she said, that the windows should be open, because every evening she looks through them and says thanks for everything she has."

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

"I got married early at 19, my husband was seven years older than me. He was an extremely educated and intelligent person and had a special influence on me in our family life. I have a friend who lives in New Jersey. We met at school, her father was a professor and head of a department at the Construction Institute. Various interesting people often came to them and I really liked being their guest. In Kiev we had a very good friend - Misha Belousov. He studied at Kiev University, graduated from the Faculty of International Relations, and became a diplomat. We met constantly, for many years we celebrated the New Year together. These wonderful people have had a special influence on me."

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

"I worked for 37 years at the institute, and during my work I communicated with different people and always tried to help many of them. Sometimes I even did some of the work of my subordinates to load them less. In America, I have several friends with whom I am happy to communicate. We meet, share our problems, exchange interesting information. My closest childhood friend lives in New Jersey, and I talk to her on the phone every day."

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

"My son and grandchildren are the main people in my life. They have always supported me. My son lives in Ukraine and every day I talk to him on the phone. My granddaughter comes to me from Los Angeles, and my grandson from New York. We often meet with our friends, share our problems, and exchange interesting information. I have a good friend, communication with him helps me a lot, we walk together along the ocean, shop, go to different events."

"In the Soviet Union we knew little about the catastrophe of the Jewish people during World War II. Now the Holocaust theme interests me very much, I read many articles about this terrible phenomenon. When I read that people were killed just because they were Jews, I feel pain. I had a friend who miraculously crawled out of the ditch of Babi Yar as a child and survived. Tears appear in my eyes when I imagine this. Over the years, Jewishness enters my soul more and more."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“The coronavirus pandemic and the quarantine associated with it affects people's emotional situation. I also sometimes feel a little depressed, but still try to maintain a normal daily routine. I have several good friends, now we rarely meet, but we celebrate birthdays together, talk on the phone every day, exchange interesting information and share our problems. Besides doing my usual household chores, I watch movies on TV, read newspapers and articles on the computer, and am interested in politics in



*Mila with her granddaughter*

America and in the world. Recently I saw a good movie ‘French Town’ about the beginning of the Second World War in France. Every week I receive the Panorama newspaper in Russian; I like short stories by the writer Khortina and articles about art. My son lives in Odessa, every telephone conversation with him gives me strength and energy. In September, my son's wife and my grandson came to visit me and we had a great time together.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“I believe in luck! When I congratulate my family and friends on the holidays, I always write ‘Good Luck’. There have been many successful events in my life. Firstly, I got married very successfully. I was only 19 years old; my husband was seven years older than me, and I immediately got into an intelligent and loving family. There was an interesting and beautiful environment around me, and I literally absorbed this wonderful and pleasant environment into me. When I was in school, I met a girl, and our friendship has continued to this day for more than 60 years. I was also lucky at work; in those years in Ukraine, it was difficult for Jews to enter an institute and get a good job, but I was lucky. After graduation, I was accepted for a prestigious job at the Scientific Research Institute in Kiev.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“I believe that the most valuable qualities of a person are honesty, love, and loyalty to your family and friends, and decency in relations with people. I really do not like it when relations between people are built only on material interest. I think it is important to be a friendly and non-conflict person. I like interesting and versatile educated people with whom it is easy to communicate on any topic.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

“Each person has different life criteria, and it is important to live so as not to regret our actions. It is necessary not to wag from side to side in relations with people, but always remain an honest, decent, and responsive person. My granddaughter, who lives in Los Angeles, often consults with me on various issues and since she is interested in my opinion, it means that the upbringing was correct. I have two grandchildren and a granddaughter; they live in different cities: Kiev, Odessa, Los Angeles. They maintain excellent relations with each other, and this is very important for them and for me.”



# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Ariy Turevskiy**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, in 1941, right before WWII started in Russia. My father worked at a factory that built tractor machinery, but started to build tanks for the Soviet Army when WWII started. The factory he worked in was going to evacuate to Stalingrad, but the Germans were so close that the factory had to evacuate to Altaisky suburb, the city of Rubtsovsk, Siberia. We had to evacuate with them. When I was an infant, my mother, father, paternal and maternal grandparents, and I were

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

on a train, in an empty train car (teplushka). We were bombarded by the Germans, but luckily no one was hurt. In Rubtsovsk we lived in barracks. My father even slept at the factory, so we did not see him for months at a time. In 1943 my sister was born. After the war ended, people started to build houses again, and we got our own apartment. My grandmother and aunt returned to Kharkov, but my father had to stay and work at the factory. In 1950, when my paternal grandmother got sick, my father wanted to quit his job and return to Kharkov but his petition to quit was denied. Only in 1954 did he get an opportunity to leave the factory. He decided to go to the city of Kursk, where he was able to get a good apartment because of his professional status. I started elementary school in 1948. I graduated 7th grade and wanted to study further but my father had a heart attack, so my family decided to place me into a technical college. When I was 16 years old my father died. I graduated college at 18 and wanted to get to Kharkovskiy Politechnicheskiiy Institute. During that time, I was working at a factory, but I got a phone call that I must go serve in the Soviet Army. I was sent to Germany. After the army I was accepted to the Kurskiy Politechnicheskiiy Institute. I graduated in 1971. I started to work as an engineer at a factory. In the 1990's I was working at a private company. I got married in 1970 and my son was born in 1971. My family and I immigrated to the USA in 2003."

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

"I remember when WWII ended, I was four years old, everyone went outside and congratulated each other, crying, hugging, and kissing. I remember having a grocery card and since my father worked at the factory all the time, I was eating his portion of bread. I remember that my school was far away, and it took me a long time to walk there. It was cold. I remember how we celebrated New Year's. We had beet salad and bread. I remember people singing songs, performing theatrical shows, and dancing. Back then, people were more friendly and open, they communicated with each other, celebrated holidays together and helped each other, but now people are more secluded and are not as caring as they used to be."



*Ariy is 5 years old.*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

"We lost many family members: two of my uncles disappeared without a trace and many others. That time was very difficult to survive. The Holocaust must never happen again!"

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I am a very positive person. I enjoy living in the USA. I love nature and kind people. I am happy that I live here. I had a heart attack and was saved by medical doctors, which I am grateful for and appreciate very much! Again, I enjoy living in the USA very much."

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"I attend a gym almost every day, I love to play chess. I enjoy travelling and communicating with my friends. I love to read and walk to Lake Murray. I love going to Symphony Hall for concerts. I love to solve crosswords and sudoku puzzles."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you're great at?**

"I know math and I play chess very well. I am very kind to people, and they treat me the same. I am a very positive person with a good sense of humor."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"Having a good life in the USA. I still hope that our economy will grow again! I hope that Democrats will not restrict our president to do good things for our country."

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"I wake up every day and hope that it will be better than the previous day. If I see something new, learn something new, or communicate with my son and grandchildren, that makes my day!"

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

"My wife and my friends helped me to get through difficult times by providing me with emotional support."

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

"I do whatever I need independently. I am a handyman. I like to work around the house, fixing things. I like to walk 8-10 kilometers a day. I like to solve crosswords."



*Ariy was a soldier in the Soviet Army.*

- **Tell me something you are proud of**

"I am very proud that I am a U.S. citizen! I am proud of my son and grandchildren. My granddaughter plays violin beautifully. I am proud of my relatives, who live in different states. I am proud that I was born in the former Soviet Union, since it had a rich culture, literature, and art. I grew up there as an honest and decent person."

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"I love to read and fix different things. I am a handyman."



- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

"My passion for life helps me move forward. My life experiences at work and with my friends also helps. Socialization with people helps to move forward."

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"I have SSI as my income to make my life easier. I have a wife, a son, and grandchildren. I live and enjoy my communication with them. "

- **When did you achieve something you are proud of?**

"I was proud that I was an engineer. I was not a member of the Communist Party. I'm proud that everything that I achieved at work only happened because of my professional knowledge and my brain."

- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

"I would not connect the Holocaust with my professional activity. Because of WWII, my father worked very hard and practically lived at the plant. Therefore, his health declined significantly, and he died when I was 16. My family was broke, and I had to go to work right away. I was unloading train cars at the train station at night and had to study hard during the day to become an engineer, so I would be able to provide for my family. The Holocaust did not hold me back in any way. I graduated from an institute and had a very successful professional life."

## 4. Connections - Friends, Family and the World

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- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?** *Ariy is 79 years old.*

“My family consisted of my mother, father and my sister. My grandparents lived in Kharkov. My maternal grandmother was a housewife, my grandfather was an educated man and worked as a manager. My father worked at a factory. My paternal grandfather had 10 brothers. He also was an educated man and opened his own brick factory. When the Communist Party came to power, they expropriated the factory. My grandfather was very upset, and he died soon after. I learned that my grandfather owned and was the director of a brick factory when I was an adult.

After my grandfather passed away, my father had to go work to help his family survive. My paternal grandmother was also a housewife. My mother graduated from university and was an English teacher at a school. My family was not religious nor members of the Communist Party. My mother had two brothers. One of them was in the military. The other brother was a student at the Institution of Ship Building. When WWII started, both of my uncles went to fight the Germans and disappeared without a trace. My father’s four sisters’ husbands also fought the Germans. They returned home after the war ended.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**  
“I was always independent and even now I do not depend on anyone. I am very proud to be independent!”
- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**  
“I always tried to help people. My friend died when he was at sea. I took good care of his family until I immigrated to the US. If someone needs anything, I am always ready to help!”
- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**  
“In my day-to-day life my lovely wife supports me a lot. She helps me with everything. She gives me advice and emotional support. We always do everything together. Also, I am very grateful that I have a low-income apartment and SSI, which gives the opportunity to have a decent life. “



- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

"The Holocaust was a very serious, tragic lesson to all Jewish people. There is no Jewish family where people did not suffer from it. Due to the Holocaust, my life turned out very differently than I had expected. All of the obstacles I had to overcome throughout my life helped me succeed later on."

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

"I like to read books, go to the fitness center, take walks, and help my wife around the house. My children and grandchildren energize me with their success. I am happy when my friends and family members are well and healthy."



- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

"I do not believe in luck. I achieved everything myself. I believe that every person needs to work hard to achieve something in life, and not count on luck."

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

"I value decent people, my friends, devotion, love, friendship and honesty."

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?**

"I think that every generation should know the history of their country and their family history. They need to know that only with hard work can they accomplish and succeed in life. Do not count on anyone or anything. People do not have to do and think what other people tell them. Do not listen to propaganda but think and make decisions on your own."

# Life Lessons-2020

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**Name: Beba Usherenko**



## **Short Biography:**

"I was born in 1934 in the city of Belaya Tserkov', a suburb of Kiev in the Ukraine. My mother was an accountant. She was a very beautiful woman. My mother gave birth to me when she was 21. My father was a merchandise supplier. In 1939, my father fought in the war with Poland. He was a Lieutenant. Back then the Soviet Union partially invaded Poland. In 1940 my brother was born. We evacuated in 1941 and were in a train car. My brother got sick with an infectious disease and died. My youngest sister was born after the war, in 1946. I have two nieces in Israel, they are twins: they are my sister's daughters. We evacuated in August of 1941 from Belaya Tserkov' to Uzbekistan, Bukharskaya oblast'. We lived there in the village of Keshlak,

Interviewed and translated by Alina Orlyanskaya

in a small house made of clay, called a “kibitka.” Most of the people who were evacuated, died from hunger. My father went to the army by choice. He was a nurse and carried wounded soldiers from the battlefield. Before the war started in 1940, he was sent to take medical courses in Leningrad, since the USSR was preparing for war.”

“We were saved by our neighbors: a family of four. They were rich and had nice clothes. They helped my mother find a job and we moved to the Sverdlovsky Suburb, Bukharskaya oblast’. There, in 1942, I started elementary school. We lived there for two years and then moved to the city of Frunze, which was in present-day Kyrgyzstan, where my mother’s relatives lived. We had a room in the dormitory complex and my mother got a job as an accountant. My father was wounded from the war. He returned to Belaya Tserkov’ in 1945. In January of 1946, my mother and I also returned to Belaya Tserkov’. I went to the 4th grade and graduated school in 1952 with a silver medal. In the same year, I was accepted to the Kiev Pedagogical Institute, as a Physics-Mathematics major. I graduated in 1956. I worked as a math and physics teacher in a village, teaching 8th and 9th grades. I returned to Belaya Tserkov’ in a year but could not get a job. I had to change my profession and ended up working at a plant as an engineer. I got married in 1963 and moved to Kiev, where I also got a job as an engineer. I worked there until 1989. I had a son in 1964. My family and I immigrated to the USA in 1993.”

## 1. Looking at Myself

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- **Please tell me about yourself when you were a child.**

“I started to talk at the early age. When I was three years old, I went to a preschool. I remember the children that were there with me. I met them after the war and recognized them. We had a music teacher, who brought out my musical abilities, which I did not know I had. I remember poems and music from the preschool. I remember that I was Snow White for the New Year. We knew lots of poems and songs. I remember the taste of the food at the preschool, it was delicious. In Frunze, I had lots of friends who were older than me. I remember being in the Pioneer camp in Frunze, it was a great time. When we decided to return to Ukraine, my friends gave me lots of gifts.”



*Beba with her parents and younger sister.*

- **Have you carried any lessons from the Holocaust with you throughout life?**

“We have to believe in our destiny and believe in happy outcomes. Fortunately, we did not die during the war. I met my husband by chance. I got a job by chance.”

- **What do you enjoy?**

"I enjoy that I live! I love to attend the College Avenue Center ESL classes. It saves me from loneliness. I met great people that I communicate with even now. I also met a great person, Alina Orlyanskaya, who helps the seniors all the time; I got lots of help from her studying English. In difficult times, she always comes to help!"

- **How do you like to spend your time?**

"I loved to watch new movies and go to the theater. I attended museums and exhibitions with my husband. I love to celebrate holidays and birthdays. Every summer we went somewhere and saw a lot. I went to many cities because of work, wherever I traveled, I attended the museums and exhibitions there."

- **What is something that your friends and family would say you're great at?**

"I'm always ready to help people with everything I can. I can help to fill out paperwork. I am very modest and shy."

## 2. Hope and Strength

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- **What gave you hope until now?**

"My family and my friends give me hope. My family and I left the former Soviet Union because of Chernobyl and Anti-Semitism. I hoped that my son would have better opportunities to work and live a decent life in the USA. When my husband passed away, I was depressed. My family, as well as my friends, and the Adult Day Health Center supported me a lot. I also receive moral and financial support from the Jewish Family Service. I was happy to attend the College Avenue Center English as a Second Language class."



*Beba with her son and grandson.*

- **What does a good day look like for you? What makes it a good day?**

"My health condition makes my day, as well as hearing good news on TV. Knowing about the success of my children and grandchildren also makes my day. My grandson graduated from university, got a great job and bought his own condo. I am very happy for him."

- **What helps you get through difficult times?**

"My sense of humor helps me get through difficult times. I always hope that everything will be alright. "

- **What are you currently doing independently?**

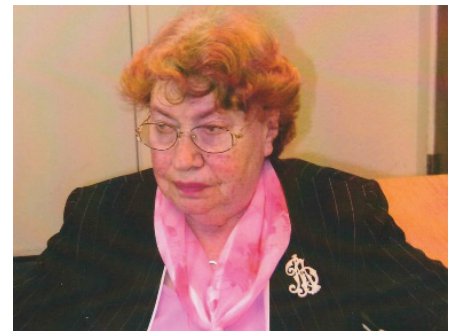
"I can fill out different applications and forms. I can make breakfast, get snacks."

- **Tell me something you are really proud of**

"I am very proud of my citizenship in the USA. I am also proud of my family. My son, my daughter-in-law, and grandchildren take good care of me. I am a decent person, who likes to share with others."

### 3. Challenges and Successes

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- **What do you enjoy doing the most?**

"I enjoy life! My children and grandchildren give me lots of joy! My grandson graduated from high school and was accepted to UCSD; therefore, I am very happy for him."

*Beba, 86 years old.*

- **What have you learned so far that could be helpful moving forward?**

"My life experience helps me move forward. I had lots of difficulties in my life and it seemed that I would not be able to overcome them, but I did my best to achieve what I could and move forward. My husband was very smart and wise, he could predict things, and he helped me a lot through my life. "

- **What resources do you have around you to make this easier?**

"Everything in my life makes it easier, except my poor health condition. I lost my good health when my mother was sick and passed away. Here, in the U.S., I met very nice people whom I communicate with frequently. My neighbors are also very nice, and they make my life easier."

- **When did you achieve something you are really proud of?**

"I am very proud of my family. I was very proud of my husband. He gave me a lot in life! We were educated people, we read a lot, we had lots of friends. I was a very good engineer and people at work appreciated me a lot!"



- **Do you think the Holocaust prevented you from achieving anything in life or held you back in any way?**

“When I was a little girl, I wanted to play a musical instrument. After WWII we came back to Belaya Tserkov’ but our someone else had already moved into our old apartment. We got another apartment which was too small. I did not have an opportunity to learn a musical instrument as I wanted to very much. It was my dream, but because of WWII it did not happen.”

## 4. Connections- Friends, Family and the World

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*Beba with her husband and their friends.*

- **What did you learn about your family when you were young?**

“My mother was raised by her father and aunt, since her mother got sick and passed away when my mother was just three years old. I was named after my grandmother. My mother was the youngest in her family. When she was 13 years old, her father remarried. My mother had a very good relationship with her stepmother, who I always thought of as my grandmother. She worked as a secretary at a school. My mother told me a lot about her family. My father also was the youngest in his family. They were very poor, and my father had to start working at early age. He would have done well in school but did not have the opportunity to study.”

- **Who are the special people on whom you can depend?**

“I can depend only on my son’s family. We decide everything together, and they help me with everything. They help me fill out paperwork online and take me to doctors’ appointments and tests. They call me all the time to make sure that I’m alright.”

- **What role do you play in the lives of the people you care about?**

“I think that I play an important role in their lives. They always consider my opinion.”

- **Who supports you in your day-to-day life? In what way?**

“My daughter-in-law helps me a lot with house chores. She buys me gifts during the holidays, and I am very grateful to her for everything she does for me.”

- **Did the Holocaust change your understanding of the world? Do you think you understand the world better now? Or not as well?**

“During our evacuation, my family experienced a lot of sorrow. After going through all of what my family and I went through, I started to appreciate things a lot more. Things like peace, food, and clothing. I understand the world much better now. Back in the former Soviet Union, we did not know a lot about the Holocaust, but after coming to the U.S., we learned about what really happened.”

## 5. Meaning and Truths

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- **What do you like to do in your spare time? What energizes you?**

“I am not doing much at this time since the quarantine started. I love walking with my friends, watching TV, and solving crosswords. When I hear good news from my children and grandchildren, that gives me energy.”

- **Do you believe in luck? Do you think it has influenced the events in your life?**

“I believe in luck! It influences my personal life; I met my husband by chance. I could not find a job in Kiev because I was Jewish, and some Russian people helped me find one.”

- **What are the things in your life that you really value?**

“I value life itself! I value friendship with people, love, trust, order, and decency. I have a good memory and very much appreciate good deeds from people. I also remember people who offended me.”

- **What have you learned about life that you can pass along to future generations?** “I would want for the next generations to appreciate life and follow the right path. Do not overwork yourself and be sure to take breaks occasionally. I wish for people to have more interests in new things, and to find work where they can contribute to society.”