

**Sofia Yarova**  
**MY LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION**

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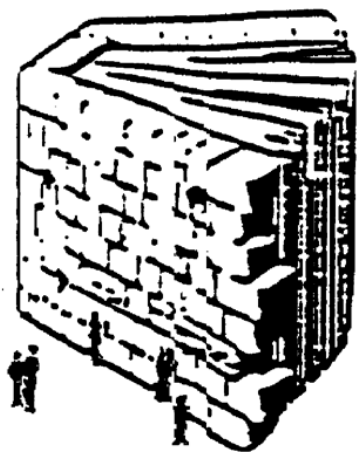
Kyiv 2022

Published with support from the Ukrainian World Foundation (Ukrainian World Congress) in commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy

## WORD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

“Armies could not resist the Nazis. But those people could.”

VAAD of UKRAINE



ВААД УКРАЇНИ  
VAAD of UKRAINE

UKRAINIAN WORLD CONGRESS  
(CANADA)



УКРАЇНСЬКА СВІТОВА ФУНДАЦІЯ  
(КАНАДА)

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Sofia Hryhorivna Yarova was Ukraine's Righteous Among the Nations, teacher and moral leader. During the Second World War, Sofia and her mother Yefrosinia Boiko heroically rescued Jews in Nazi-occupied Kyiv.

Back then, upon learning of anyone who attempted to save a Jew, the Nazi administration would immediately execute both the rescuers, along with their families, and the Jew they were trying to rescue, which is further proof of how valorous and brave Sofia's family was.

From September 29, 1941 onwards, when Kyiv-based Jews were ordered to show up at Babyn Yar, Sofia and Yefrosinia sheltered a few Jews. They rescued a total of seven people over the three-year Nazi occupation period.

In recognition of their exploit, Yefrosinia Boiko and her daughter Sofia Yarova were awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" title by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.

*You are now holding in your hands Sofia Yarova's memoirs published upon her request. One year before her death, Sofia Hryhorivna asked me to publish these memoirs. I am truly grateful for her trust and privileged to publish the book. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Sofia Hryhorivna's daughter, Hanna, who helped me publish the memoirs, to the Levitas family, including Svitlana, Iryna and Felix Levitas, who at some point in time personally introduced me to Sofia Hryhorivna, to Josef Zissels, Mykhailo Komisaruk, Denys Chernyshov, Inna Tiutiun, Hennadiy Khelemskyi and Yevhenia Khelemska for their financial backing of the project, as well as to the "Word of the Righteous" project team members whose support has been absolutely critical to the success of the project.*

At the end of the book, the memoirs are supplemented with accounts of Sofia Yarova's life shared by people who are dear to us.

*Margarita Ormotsadze-Yakovleva  
Producer, "Word of the Righteous"*

## MY CHILDHOOD

Boiko Hryhoriy Tryfonovych was my father and my mother's full name was Khomenko Yefrosinia Trokhymivna.

I was born on September 18, 1925 in an apartment block located at 127 Chervonoarmiyska Street, with a very impressive birth weight of 5.2 kg. I always looked a bit more grown up than both my elder and younger brothers. My weight must have saved my life when one of my brothers, looking out of the window to see if our mom was coming home, accidentally pushed me out of the window on the second floor and I landed on my buttocks softly. When my mom was taking me to hospital in a pushchair, I was silent, holding firmly a slice of bread in my hand so that no one could take a grip on it. My face turned blue as, apparently, I was scared. Just imagine what would have happened had I not been so lucky. I was fated to survive!

Being just ordinary people, my parents were nonetheless very decent and trustworthy, especially my mom. No wonder she was putting her own life and the lives of her children at risk to rescue a Jewish neighbor and then an additional four people during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. She was awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" title in Jerusalem. As an orphan, she was illiterate, just like the other two brothers and a sister of hers. My mom was just eight years old when she had to start working hard. They lived in Vasylkiv.

At the age of 19, upon the recommendation of her friends, my mom decided to seek a new job in Kyiv, where her paternal aunt was based. During the first week after her arrival, being unemployed, my mom and her friends decided to go for a walk to Khmelnytskyi Square (prior to the October Revolution, lower class people used to take a stroll there). Riding in a horse-drawn carriage, my would-be father was heading to the village of Roslavychi, some 20 km south of Kyiv, trying to make it to his wedding. But he never did. Having seen my mom (she was very beautiful), he decided to stay, and they got married two weeks later.

My mother-in-law told me this story after my mom's death. To say it was an unsuccessful marriage would be a considerable understatement. They were absolutely different people.

After four years of study at college, my dad became a tailor and then a worker. As a communist, he was a bright and responsible person. Prior to the war, he worked as on-site manager of an apartment block and then as Head of the Kaganovich (later known as Moskovskiy) District Trade Union Committee of Public Utility Workers, a person who was very popular among the district's street cleaners and other utility workers. When the war broke out, he was in charge of a fighter squadron stationed in the basement of the Vatutin Cinema House located at Chervonoarmiyska Street.

My parents never had an argument with each other. Instead, they used to lead their own lives separately. We had a shed, where my mom kept a pig and a few hens and ducks.

Our lifestyle was quite modest. Every morning my dad would give five rubles to my mom. She was very dignified and beautiful. No one knew the details of her private life. She was always very strong-willed. My elder brother Zhora and I were able to do all the household chores, including cooking, cleaning the house, feeding our domestic animals, collecting duckweed near the Baikove cemetery and pulling out weeds. Those were our major after-school responsibilities. In the fall, we used to butcher a pig. My mom would allow us to enjoy some meat dishes for a couple of days before selling the rest of the meat to her

permanent clients on Mytrofanivska Street. We nonetheless kept all lard in a special box and, in addition, had a vegetable patch.

My mother did not keep any domestic animals until 1937, when we had to go through a very tough time. Following a false denunciation, my dad was expelled from the Communist Party and became jobless, allegedly for participating in the Green Ataman's gang in 1919. We were expecting his arrest any day, but God saved us. He was then reinstated as a Communist Party member.

My mom spent the money that we used to make on a suit for my dad, some stuff for my brothers and a cotton dress for me. In total, I had four dresses, and nobody in our class was privileged enough to have four dresses: blue, green, brown and black. Every morning we would send someone to a local store to buy 200 grams of jam, which we then used to make sandwiches for school.

My father contributed a lot to our personal development. We had a guitar, balalaika, mandolin, bicycle, domino, chess and checkers, unlike more than twenty other children from our playground who lived in two neighboring apartment blocks. I was a really good chess player. My father and I would occasionally play chess until 2-3 a.m. Most of all, however, we enjoyed playing cards, keeping it secret from our dad. At first, I was ashamed of letting anyone know that I liked playing cards, but when I learned that it was Gorky's favorite pastime, I no longer concealed my hobby.

In 1932, my brother Zhora and I went to School No. 56 as first graders. Although Zhora was one year older than I, he had a poor health condition. The weather in 1932 was so dry that we could literally insert our small fingers in soil cracks.

A famine then broke out ahead of the winter of 1932-1933. The winter and spring of 1933 were the most horrible periods. But none of Kyiv residents died of starvation. Villagers who relocated to Kyiv were struggling to find support in the city.

I remember countless corpses piled up every morning in horse-drawn carriages heading towards the cemetery along Chervonoarmiyska Street. People who had at least some relatives managed to survive. Two brothers and two sisters of my dad lived in our apartment, together with two brothers of my mom. Andriy, the son of aunt Marika who rescued Tania Lypnytska in 1942, was a beggar. A baker's shop was situated in our three-story apartment block, so people used to give bread to him. He would fill his bag with bread by the end of each week, bringing it afterwards to his father and mother in Roslavychi.

I also remember our black, long-eared dog Nerka. She would keep dancing until someone decided to feed her. The dog also survived.

As a communist, my father was sent to the city of Talalaivka. We lived there as well. I did not see people who were dying. However, my mom once found an exhausted boy under a haystack. It happened in April, and all of us were taking care of him. He then left us ten days later.

When we moved to Kyiv from Talalaivka, my younger brother Sasha, who was born in 1928, was kidnapped in Kyiv. My mom and I were looking for him all day long. At night, we checked a few shelters for abandoned children. There were hundreds of them. Left primarily at railway stations, those children were then found by groups of young people. But Sasha was not one of them. A street cleaner from Demiyivka spotted him sitting naked at the doorway to an apartment block and brought him back home. Sasha knew our address, so finding us took no effort.



The wife of my mom's brother from Vasylkiv left my cousins Vania and Hrunia at Kyiv's railway station. Before the war broke out, my mother managed to find them in an orphanage. Needless to say, it was a huge tragedy for our people. It must never happen again.

In 1933, Zhora and I became first graders again. There was no school in Talalaivka. In our family, no one was able to teach us because our father was always busy and our mother was illiterate. We went to School No. 56 again. Aside from just a few things, I can hardly recall the first two grades. But I do remember one teacher quite well. I am not quite sure about his patronymic name but his surname was Honcharov. He was a very good teacher.

In 1934, my dad was appointed Secretary of the Communist Party in the village of Horenychy located near Sviatoshyn and Bilohorodka. In March, local authorities sent a horse-drawn carriage to us, and we moved to where our father was based. In the village, there was a beautiful church, club and steam mill. Close to the mill, there were some storage premises with a remote 14 sq m area equipped with an oven, which was used for heating. We lived there. My brother and I were second graders. He was a poor performer, but I must have studied quite well because, at our graduation ceremony organized in the local club, I was awarded a piece of toilet soap. I heard the announcement but never saw the soap. We returned to Horenychy in April 1935 and completed our third year of study there.

We were once sent to a pioneer camp, and I made friends with a priest's well-mannered children. Some "individualists" lived in our village, and I maintained good relations with them as well. There was only one "kulak's henchman" who had no friends and was not allowed to join a collective farm.

At first sight, collective farms operated properly. At night, however, saboteurs were trying to inflict damage by poisoning a bull, planting poison ampules or setting crops ablaze. The main objective of our group of pioneers was to protect crops from arson. During the summer, we prevented two arsons. Our meals were really good but we had nowhere to sleep, so we had to look for a place to lay our heads. I used to eat my meal quickly and then rushed to a hat stand to take a rest in a place reserved for hats. During that period of time, I memorized a few lines of the following song:

*We are not alone in a collective farm,  
Supervising the fields of golden grain...  
Our work has saved us from much harm,  
Comrade Postyshev, reporting to you again.*

In 1936, opposite our apartment block, School No. 130 was opened on the even-numbered side of Chervonoarmiyska Street. I remember we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school on April 26, 1986.

Before the war, only few Russian-language schools were available in Kyiv, with just two of them located in the Kaganovich District. Most children went to Ukrainian-language schools. In our neighbourhood, Sioma Barash was the only pupil who went to one of Kyiv's Russian-language schools. We had brilliant teachers and I am so grateful to many of them. Owing to my teacher Vasyl Hryhorovych Tkachenko, I became a Ukrainian language teacher. He succeeded in instilling a passion for the language.

Because Ukrainian-language schools were in abundance, we could speak Ukrainian very well, whilst Russian was used predominantly in our day-to-day life. In Kyiv, Russian remained the dominant

language. But people were getting on well, with no ill-wishers coming our way due to the language issue. The war was further proof that people around us remained bright, sincere and friendly.

The war broke out right after I completed my eighth year of study. All people aged 16 to 30, who were single, were mobilized and ordered to dig trenches. Olia Lysak and I were the only two persons from our neighborhood who were engaged in trench digging. Few children remained in the city. Many boys were evacuated, including my elder brother Zhora.

I dug trenches in Kyiv and then in Vita Poshtova. Nazi forces were advancing quickly. By July 10, they reached Kyiv's outskirts. I got acquainted with members of the Komsomol medical detachment and followed their advice to join the detachment. Militia members were headquartered at the Karl Marx Sugar Factory. Wounded people were numerous, and we had to escort them to a Pechersk-based hospital. Kyiv was bombarded on a daily basis.

We went through a very challenging time when our soldiers were ordered to regain control of the Agricultural Academy occupied by the Nazis. Following fierce fighting, which took place between August 3 and August 15, our troops squeezed the Nazi occupants out of the factory, which comprised multiple premises. It is always hard to look back at that period. Our army resisted the assaults for quite a long time. Tram No. 10, with its terminus stop at the square near Holosiyivske Lake, brought us right to the frontline.

On September 16, I was knocked down by a falling tree and suffered a head injury following a bombardment in Kyiv. Although the wound was not dangerous, I experienced hearing loss and had to insert a piece of cotton wool deep into my left ear.

On September 17, our army unexpectedly left Kyiv.





*[Photo: Chervonoarmiyska Street. 1930s]*

## HOW OUR TROOPS LEFT KYIV

September 17, 1941 was a relatively calm day. It was a kind of standstill. With no wounded or killed in action, I did not have much to do on that day. I was excused from work in the trenches and had free time until 2 p.m. the next day. On September 18, I was about to turn 16. I was happy and could see no signs of trouble. My dad was also excused from work until 2 p.m. on September 18.

He was the platoon commander of Kyiv's Kaganovich district fighting squadron stationed in the basement of the Vatutin Cinema House (formerly known as "Echo").

On the morning of September 18, I was left home alone, and then my dad returned. My mom went shopping in preparation for my birthday party. Life in Kyiv was calm and quiet. On September 15, Marshal Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny, Commander-in-Chief of the Front, addressed the nation on the radio and vehemently rejected any possibility of the Nazis ever invading Kyiv.

Having congratulated me, my dad started to bid farewell. Behaving in a strange way, he then asked us to keep calm. His squadron was relocating to areas beyond the Dnieper, following an assault landing in Zolotonosha. I quickly found my mom and we rushed to the Vatutin Cinema House at 11 a.m. We arrived just in time as the whole squadron was standing in the backyard. The soldiers were supposed to be re-deployed on the frontline beyond the Dnieper. At that time, we were well aware that they were leaving Kyiv, with no one allowed to accompany them. My body and soul get paralyzed by horror and

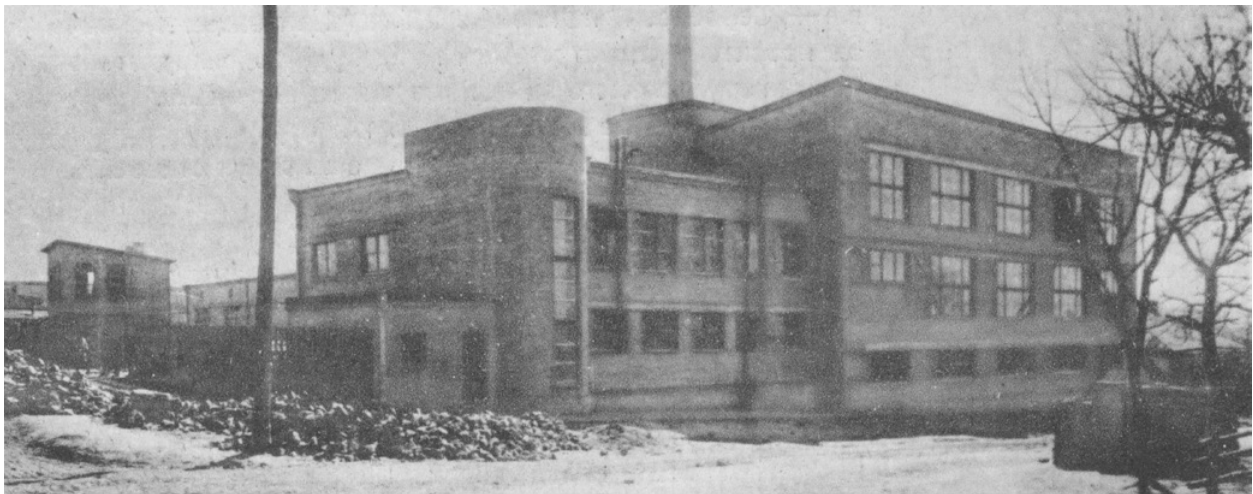
helplessness as I recollect the last minutes of our farewell. At about 2 p.m. the bridge over the Dnieper was blown up. On the night of September 17, we knew that Soviet troops left Kyiv.

Sometimes I cannot help but think how strong, courageous, wise and reserved one must be to endure those horrible and unexpected life-changing events within one day. Early in the morning, people led a normal way of life in Kyiv, but at 12 p.m. a new horrible and unknown reality eclipsed the traditional lifestyle.

There were three of us walking down Chervonoarmijska Street: my mom, my junior brother Sasha and myself. No one else was around. We could hear shells fired above our heads to target the Dnieper basin. We were scared to walk outside as we were the family of a communist who was well known in our district. My mom decided to come to Mrs. Boiko, one of her acquaintances who worked as a street cleaner. Her apartment was located close to the market stalls on the even-numbered side of Chervonoarmijska Street, squeezed in between Nemetska Street and Volodymyro-Lybid'ska Street, opposite the Volodymyrskyi Market.

Kilya Boiko welcomed us all. By nightfall, her basement was crowded with policemen, including district police officer Shilov who was a nightmare for all teenage hooligans in our district, and soldiers who missed the opportunity to cross the Dnieper. The bridge was blown up so quickly that many people did not have time to cross it. No one got any sleep at night.

In the morning, looting and plunder were rampant. All scums of society took to the streets in search of their loot: fabric, clothes, food, furniture. I felt ashamed and scared.



*[Photo: Bread Factory. 1930s]*

## ARRIVAL OF THE NAZIS

On September 19, 1941, at about 11 a.m. the Nazis were triumphantly marching along Chervonoarmijska Street, with an orchestra, like well-fed and self-satisfied conquerors as parents were hiding their young daughters under the beds.

After quite a while, we went outside because no one was looking for us. Thousands of people stood on both sides of Chervonoarmiyska Street, saluting the Nazis. Many Kyiv residents greeted the occupants with bread and salt wrapped in Ukrainian embroidered towels ("rushnyks"). Some people cried. Others expressed happiness or were overwhelmed with hatred. But the majority of Kyivans looked quite happy.

And now I understand why. Soviet rule was established just 20 years ago. Many people, especially villagers, lost their hard-earned property and wealth. They suffered from injustice. Many representatives of the deep-rooted intelligentsia lost their homes. Hoping that the good old days would be restored, they happily welcomed the Nazis.

After 23 years of Ukraine's independence, I clearly understand the motives of those people at that time. Looking ahead, their hope for the better was shattered. Within less than a year, they were waiting for liberation by the Soviet Union.

We resided at 127 Chervonoarmiyska Street. A few days later, on September 20, my mom decided to return home. She had no choice. You just cannot escape your fate. We were full of fear, horror and uncertainty. At night, our neighbor Trofim knocked on our door. De-kulakized by the Soviet government, he lived in the basement of our apartment block. We knew that he had met the Nazis with bread and salt wrapped in a rushnyk. His face was distorted with pain and full of tears: "Boychikha, my Manya has just been raped by a German soldier. On leaving us, he has left his documents behind."

I have already mentioned that, although my mom was illiterate, she was smart, brave, willing to help and had excellent problem-solving skills. She used to tell us that as people were contemplating something, she already knew what to do.

At 6 a.m. (a curfew was imposed), my mom went to School No. 130, located opposite our block, where the Nazis were based. She returned the documents to them. Trofim was no longer happy about the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Our neighbor had been waiting for the Soviet army since that time and did his best to help us.





## DAILY LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

German soldiers never treated us like human beings. I remember a disgusting situation. Our neighbor once walked with her infant baby, wrapped in a beautiful warm silk blanket, opposite Zankovetska's house at 121 Chervonoarmiytska Street. Then a car suddenly pulled up, and a German soldier wearing an officer's visor cap with a cockade and well-polished boots got out of the car and ordered the neighbor to unwrap her baby. After that, he grabbed the blanket without saying a word and walked away. Such blasphemy! The weather was quite cold at that time.

No one gave us away as the days passed. On September 22, the first explosion took place on Khreshchatyk Street. The occupants' headquarters located on Prorizna Street was blown up.

On September 23, we received a message from my dad saying that he was being held in custody at a prisoner-of-war camp located in Kyiv's Darnytskyi district. All bridges were blown up. We reached the Dnieper via the Rusanivskyi Bridge that broke in half and was left floating, with timber boards serving as interconnecting trails. In the village of Osokorky, my mom had a few acquaintances who helped us cross the Dnieper via a secret passageway (for a fee).

I saw my dad among thousands of soldiers who were kept at the camp. They would throw stones over the fence, with their exact addresses indicated in the messages attached to the stones. I delivered a lot of such messages to Kyiv residents.

People were not allowed to approach the barbed wire fence within less than 15 meters. Many soldiers were left dying from wounds. Needless to say, the defeat of four Soviet armies was marred by a huge cauldron, bloodbath and deaths...

A tragic picture comes to my mind. About ten Jewish soldiers in just their underwear, being fully aware of their fate, held each other tight to keep their bodies warm, and kept singing Soviet patriotic songs, chanting Soviet slogans and urging everyone to fight the Nazis.

One of the murdered Jews was Mr. Peisakhovich, my dad's friend and colleague, who was also the on-site manager of our apartment block. His descendants, if any, should bring memorial flowers either to the monument to the Darnytskyi camp's soldiers or to his grave in Bykovnia, where he was buried.

My dad was set free two weeks later. The Nazis would release Ukrainian soldiers from the camp if the latter provided documentary evidence of them being non-communists and non-Jews. We managed to bring such proof. Our neighbor Bondarenko was the first person to sign the document. Upon his release, my dad was sent to my mom's sister who lived in the village of Barakhty, Vasylkivskyi District, where he was based until January 1943. Then he returned to Kyiv. At that time people were no longer scared that someone could give them away. All traitors were gone. Local residents looked forward to meeting the Soviet army.



[Photo: Yefrosinia Boiko and her daughter Sofia and granddaughter Hanna]

## THE FATE OF JEWS IN NAZI-OCCUPIED KYIV

Everyone was sure that Jews would be sent to Palestine. The situation was calm and quiet. Sioma Barash, a student from Kharkiv, left our apartment block to see his parents but they were missing. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, he was nonetheless able to walk unassisted. We begged him to stay but he still wanted to go to Palestine.

By 12 p.m. it became obvious that Jews were subject to execution. Thousands of Kyiv residents rushed to rescue them, trying to hide those who were able to break free from the ill-fated crowd and those who decided to stay away from it. Today, as I recall those moments, I am astounded by the spiritual wealth, morality and humanity demonstrated by Soviet people. They kept helping, rescuing and hiding Jews even at the risk of their own lives.

Today we call it an exploit. No, it was not an exploit. We were brought up to behave in that way. It was the norm for Soviet citizens. My mom saved so many people, both friends and strangers, and I was right beside her.

Since 1992, the State of Israel has been awarding the “Righteous Among the Nations” title to people who saved Jews. Although 300 awardees have already received the title, many died prematurely. A lot of holders of the title, including my mom, were awarded posthumously. In Kyiv, there are only 17 people, myself included, who are the Righteous Among the Nations, with the majority of them being over 90 and bed-ridden. Those who were unable to prove their contribution to rescuing Jews (some of them died, others were murdered or went missing) were awarded the “Righteous of Babyn Yar” title by Kyiv’s Jewish Council. There are currently 44 Righteous of Babyn Yar and 26 children of the Righteous of Babyn Yar.

In Jerusalem, the Avenue of the Righteous was built. Next to each monument, a tree was planted with the full name of the rescuer engraved on the plaque adjacent to the tree. My pupil Misha Veksler visited the avenue and took a photo of the plaque with our names on it: “Yefrosinia Boiko and her daughter Sofia Yarova”. Upon their death, all these people will always be remembered by their descendants.

It turned out that my uncle, who was my mom’s brother, Khomenko Petro Trokhymovych, did not end up at the Darnytskyi district camp. Rather, he was held in custody at a camp located on Kerosynna Street (also known as “Kerosinka”) in Kyiv. The prisoners of this camp were ordered to bury the bodies of Jews executed at Babyn Yar on September 29, 1941. My uncle’s recollections of the massacre sent shivers down my spine. The scene was intolerable for a person in good mental health.

The earth was breathing. It was unbearable to see infants being pulled by their legs by the Nazis to separate them from their mothers and then dump their bodies into a pit where many people were still agonizing. Upon his return to the camp, my uncle intentionally cut his leg with a can. This self-inflicted injury helped him take a break from coming back to Babyn Yar the next day.

German forces, especially locals who helped the Nazi police, released Ukrainians for a bribe if they were provided with documentary proof that they were neither communists nor Jews. Two weeks later, my uncle returned home. He looked like a helpless person. A handsome man who was two meters tall, he turned out to be unable to survive those tragic events. He unexpectedly died from galloping tuberculosis.



## THE FIRST STEPS AIMED AT SAVING JEWS

On October 12, 1941, Semen Lypnytskyi (uncle Sioma), who was a Jew and our neighbor, visited us. We were on friendly terms with his family, including his wife Tania, daughter Maika, 12, and son Alik, 2. We met at my mom's place (everyone called her Boychikha). I remember we had a large folding table that accommodated 12 people, including the Bondarenkos, our neighbors, and uncle Sioma. He was uniformed having just escaped from the prisoner-of-war camp.

As was mentioned above, my mom was very good at solving complex issues in a proactive manner. When the guests started to leave our home, everyone knew about uncle Sioma's plan to keep going further at 7 p.m., with a view to reaching the Dnieper. At 8 p.m., people were pretty sure that uncle Sioma had already left. All our neighbors sighed with relief: they were in fear for their lives...

But the events unfolded in a different way. My mom provided uncle Sioma with my dad's clothes. He stayed overnight in our apartment and then got to the opposite side of the Dnieper via a secret crossing. We never received any information about him since that time, but in 1944 his family got a message saying that Soviet soldier Semen Lypnytskyi was killed in action in 1944.

During the first days of occupation, the Nazis were unable to control every aspect of social life, because they had to resolve a lot of other issues: prisoners of war, explosions on Khreshchatyk Street, etc. Over the course of the first week, the occupants did not gain control over the bread factory located at the intersection of Predslavynska Street and Tverska Street. At the factory, tons of flour were stored next to dried bread piled up in paper bags.

My mom, accompanied by my junior brother (Zhora, my senior brother, was evacuated earlier and then discharged from military service in Vienna at the end of the war) managed to grab 20 bags of dried bread. One month later, all the bags were gone. Every day we saw hundreds of exhausted Soviet soldiers escorted by German forces along Chervonoarmiyska Street en route to Vasylkiv. Local residents would share with them everything they had. By the end of October, however, we ran out of our supplies. Besides, the total number of prisoners of war decreased.

The road to Vasylkiv was lined with new graves! The Nazis treated our soldiers in a heinous and brutal way. Some eyewitnesses told me about the Dnieper navy sailors who demonstrated the unparalleled level of disobedience, pride, and human dignity. Their hands were bound with barbed wire. It is impossible to conquer a country where such people live. All of them were shot at Babyn Yar.

## THE FIRST WINTER UNDER NAZI OCCUPATION

And then hunger and cold ensued. Civilians were mistreated by the occupants. We tried to survive on our own. Ordinary people, like my mom, started to barter their supplies in exchange for food provided by villagers. You could trade in a bed sheet for three glasses of flour and four glasses of peas.

There was a poor harvest of potatoes that year, so flour and peas were the main products. My mom's sister from the village of Barakhty, where my dad was hiding, was the first person to give us some flour and peas. My mom would go from door to door in an attempt to trade in goods that were in high demand in villages. And her efforts were successful. Every week she would go to a village to bring food for my brother and myself for the upcoming week. To get that food, she would go to the Volodymyrskyi Market in Kyiv to find the items that were sought-after by villagers. These goods could then be traded in

for food. My grandfather Trifon, my dad's father, came to us on a weekly basis to get his rationed food. A bowl of pea soup, without any dressing, and a slice of dried bread were the best food during that period.

The Hungarians, who were based at School No. 56, were willing to help for some compensation. They provided people with salt, baking soda, kerosene, cigarettes "Hunia" and "Simfonia", matches. In return, they accepted everything: clothes, dishware, gold, silver. This is how ordinary people were trying to survive. Representatives of the intelligentsia, who were not used to manual labor, had a very hard time. They lived for as long as they had anything to trade in. But then they started to die en masse in the winter and spring of 1942, like in Leningrad.

There was a young lady who worked as the on-site manager of our apartment block. During that time, a lot of young immoral ladies tended to establish a relationship with the Nazis for the purpose of looting both vacant and inhabited apartments. I knew such a lady. She would give away Jews and communists, looting their apartments. When the Soviet army liberated the country, she faced trial and was sentenced to ten years in prison. Her last name was Bondarenko-Kleshcheva. She was a shameless person. The on-site manager of our apartment block, however, was less brazen. My mom had to appease her all the time to the extent possible because she knew that I was a member of the medical detachment during the Battle of Kyiv.

My uncle Petro was bed-ridden already. His wife, aunt Galia, was taking good care of him. She was a wonderful person. They resided at 127 Gorkoho Street. Our apartment blocks had the same number. Three one-story houses were located in that backyard. A Jewish family including Sonia Tikhman and her daughters Nelia, 5, and Vera, 4, lived in one of those houses. Her husband was Ukrainian. He was fighting on the front.

## FRIENDS AND FOES

September 1941 saw the revival of Kyiv's "cultural life". We had no radio as all radio sets were handed in to the Nazi administration. Non-compliant people were subject to capital punishment. Kyiv's governor was then appointed and the "*Ukrainske Slovo*" newspaper was launched. Invitations to meetings with the patriots of Ukraine were distributed in Kyiv. Galia Vaintrob and I went to one of those meetings held on Vorovskoho Street.

Olena Teliga hosted the meeting organized in a very big hall. She told the audience that she came from, if I am not mistaken, Czechoslovakia, where her family moved to in 1919. As one of the members of the Central Council of Ukraine, her father fought for Ukraine's independence. She also told the attendees that she was pursuing her father's goal and that an independent Ukraine would be proclaimed with the help of Germany. Then she embarked on anti-Soviet propaganda.

The speech by radio announcer Belaya shocked me. She was the lead announcer at Soviet radio stations glorifying the Soviet Union. At that meeting, however, she started to say just the opposite, slinging mud at the Soviet system, complaining about her persecution and expressing gratitude to the Nazis for liberation. At that moment, I was unable to imagine the co-existence of two absolutely different persons within one body. As I walked home, I was devastated and never attended such meetings again.

The "*Ukrainske Slovo*" newspaper was constantly demonizing the Soviet past in parallel with glorifying and commending the Nazi regime. As far as I understand, the Nazis were then fed up with Ukrainian

gratitude. In early December, all new Ukrainians, including Teliga, were arrested and murdered. Those who were not executed went underground. Overall, they did not have any influence on our society.

A few days later, the *“Nove Ukrainske Slovo”* newspaper was introduced. Leontiy Forostivskyi became Kyiv’s governor.

Sonia Pikman did not follow the order. She worked at the Bozhenko factory. Our neighborhood, especially street cleaner Varia, helped Jews survive. A young on-site manager of our apartment block, guided by her “call of duty”, decided to give her away to the Nazi administration.

On a very cold day in early January 1942, as ordered by the on-site manager, Sonia helped her daughters get dressed, tying their headscarves and giving backpacks to them. The district headquarters was located at School No. 35 behind Kyiv’s Operetta House. Sonia provided all the details to me afterwards. When they came to the headquarters, an old German soldier was on duty. The manager told him that she had brought a “Jude” to him.

I can now clearly imagine how he looked in the beautiful, scared, blue eyes of the girls. He was humane! The soldier made her assume the necessary posture and then kicked her butt so fiercely that she dug into a pile of snow. Then he turned to Sonia and said in German: “Mother, go home!” He repeated the phrase a few times. Sonia did not speak German but she understood him.

On that day, my mom and I were at my uncle’s place. All members of the neighborhood were concerned about Sonia and her children. When they entered the backyard, people greeted them with tears of happiness! Once the situation became clear to my mom, she knew what to do next.

Aunt Galia, uncle Petia’s wife, grew up in an orphanage in the 1930s. On the next day, my mom, aunt Galia and Sonia went to the headquarters. I was left at home with other children. My mom took the floor (she was very beautiful). She told the commandant that they were brought up in orphanages and considered themselves to be Ukrainians. Sonia’s husband was Ukrainian, and she had the documentary evidence. The commandant ordered that Sonia be provided with a certificate as proof of her being Ukrainian.

The Nazis found it difficult to identify the nationality of a person. Sonia’s appearance and accent were typical of a Jewish woman. She stood out from the Slavic crowd. A local who collaborated with the Nazi police stood nearby. Grinning all the time, he clearly understood what was going on, but did not give us away. We were so lucky to have met the commandant!

The whole neighborhood supported Sonia and her children. Sonia’s husband Vania returned from the front. She then gave birth to their son Aliosha. After my mom died in 1963 at the age of 61, she regularly visited her grave. I met with her senior daughter Nelia quite often. She was on friendly terms with aunt Galia’s nieces. When Sonia passed away, we moved to another district. I will always remember them and their blue eyes.

## WORK AT THE RAILWAY

On January 25, 1942, a train with people who volunteered to work in Germany left Kyiv. I saw off my friend Galia Skriagina. As an orphan, she lived with her godmother. It was not the lack of patriotism that forced her to leave the country.

Numerous people from other regions, including Jews, joined her. They had nothing to lose and hoped to survive. Yuzik Babutin, my classmate, also went to Germany. In an effort to escape Babyn Yar, he had to hide away for four months. And he did survive. The second train with volunteers went to Germany in February.

Then forced migration to Germany ensued. Married people were disqualified. On March 3, 1942, I received from the on-site manager of our apartment block a subpoena to visit the commandant's office. My neighbor Olga Lysak, 27, was also subpoenaed.

As many as 50 people were present. No one had any understanding of why we were there and where we were supposed to go. We stopped at a freight train station. We thought they were going to send us to Germany but instead they ordered us to work at the station. As laborers at HBD-Sud headquartered at Kyiv-Moskovskyi Station, we received our IDs known as *Ausweis*. The latter served as protection against endless raids that aimed to identify people who were subject to deportation to Germany.

We had to work hard repairing railway tracks. At lunchtime, they gave us porridge with 25% mouse droppings and a slice of bread. Every Saturday we worked reduced hours. The only day off was on Sunday. We could afford two pea pies and a half-loaf of bread for a wage that we received on Saturdays.

I was very surprised to learn that May 1 was a public holiday known as "Spring Holiday Day".

We were so lucky to be assigned to our supervisor, an old man who was thought to be a *Volksdeutsche* Pole. He was humane and never beat up anyone. The supervisor called me "Shafeya".

When he was replaced by a new supervisor from Czechoslovakia, Mr. Grinzolik, we could not even imagine how atrocious he was. His eyes were always full of anger. He was torturing and beating us up all the time.

Two months later, a German supervisor arrived. He was absolutely indifferent to everything. Most importantly, the new supervisor never beat us. He used to tell us almost every day that he was striving to find a lady he fell in love with back in 1918.

## A MOUTHFUL OF WATER FOR THE COMMANDER

One month later, Kyiv's central railway station became our permanent place of work. The building of the station was destroyed, with part of it being burnt down. A "railway colony" was located there, with a lot of crushed metal left on its premises. Our task was to clean up the flooded basements full of sand and huge acid bowls, which were partially destroyed. We had to lay wooden flooring to be able to work because the water around us contained a lot of acid.

During that period, we got acquainted with Vasia. Rumor had it he was a member of an underground organization. He gathered around him about ten people who were like me and showed them how to sabotage railway track laying. Most importantly, Vasia helped our guys escape the deportation to Germany. Freight trains loaded with forced migrants would leave for Germany almost every day. Three wooden planks were loosely attached to a fence, so escapees could squeeze in and sneak into the Solomianskyi Market. The escape plan worked smoothly: some people were on the lookout close to the warehouse, while others were responsible for steering the escapee to the secret passageway.

In the summer of 1942, a tightly closed freight train full of our prisoners of war stopped for a few minutes at Kyiv's central railway station. I was on duty, along with a handsome and well-mannered boy called Robert. He was younger than I and very tall. Our team included many boys aged 14-15 at the time.

Suddenly, I noticed a hand holding a flask sticking out of a small window with barbed wire and heard a voice: "Guys, give me some water, our commander is dying." Central railway stations were dotted with water taps installed at an interval of about ten meters, with bowls placed deep into the ground in-between the taps for fire safety purposes.

Robert swiftly passed the flask on to me and climbed the railway car to get closer to the window. At that very moment, the train started to move. Despite the Nazi guards yelling at me, I gave the flask back to Robert on the move and then, after stepping onto a bowl with water, my left leg fell through the lid and got injured. But most importantly, when I was falling down, I was lucky enough to get hold of the handrail, thereby saving my hand from being sliced off by the moving train.

Having returned the flask to the soldier, Robert quickly helped me get on my feet. I looked awful: with loose parts of my skin all over the place, my leg was a bloody mess. Even now I find it difficult to describe my feelings at that moment. Surrounded by the Nazis who were mocking me, I kept walking proudly without feeling any pain. Deep inside, I felt pride and a lot of disrespect for the Nazi army. I was happy because our commander got some water from us.

Vasia explained that our prisoners of war were escorted following fierce fighting near the Khorol River. He then disappeared unexpectedly, just the way he emerged one day. I have never heard anything about him since then.

## LIFE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND BEYOND

When Mr. Kovalskyi saw my leg, he exclaimed: "Shafeya, what's that?" He then gave me a bandage and some iodine, which we put on my leg. I was excused from work on that day and the next day. I was just sitting around and doing nothing. Being fully aware of what had happened to my leg, my co-workers gave me a bunch of planks that I used to bring home every day.

The planks were 75-80 cm long, 25-30 cm wide and 25-30 cm high. Walking home from the central railway station, we normally headed towards the Baikovy Bridge and then to Mytrofanivska (later known as Kovpaka – ed.) Street. Our apartment block was located at the corner, with two entrances leading to it. I had to carry those bunches of planks because it was the only way to warm up the block with no central heating.

Our neighborhood at 127 Chervonoarmiyska Street included two adjacent blocks. A three-story building overlooked Chervonoarmiyska Street, and the façade of a two-story building, where we lived, was located on Mytrofanivska Street. Our neighbors were decent people. Volodia Pavliuk, our street cleaner's son, was the only disgrace in our neighborhood. A hardcore criminal, he joined the Nazi police once the war broke out. His parents, father Luka, who was a street cleaner, and mother Maryna, were very modest and hard-working people.

Most residents were evacuated. People of my age were all gone, except for Galia Vaintrob, born in 1921, Klava Tolmakh, born in 1929, and myself, born in 1925. The war and occupation created a special bond

between us. Galia was born to a very poor and large family. She had two brothers, Boris and Tolia, who were called “pickpockets” because they were petty thieves. Boris was hanged by the Nazis for stealing kerosene. Tolia went missing when serving his time in jail.

Galia was the most successful among them. Before the war, she worked as a telephone operator at a national long-distance telephone station. Wearing a uniform, she became a telephone operator at the headquarters of Bagramyan’s 37<sup>th</sup> army during the war. When our troops were retreating, Galia suffered an arm injury and was taken prisoner. Most of the soldiers of the 37<sup>th</sup> army managed to escape the Kyiv cauldron.

Heading to the Darnytsia camp where my father was held in custody, my mother and I met Galia who had been set free. She was constantly holding her arm with a smashed elbow close to her chest, which led to the limb healing in a misplaced position. Her elbow joint was missing.

One week later, Galia and her mother moved to Prozorivska Street. Now I understand why. Her father converted to a different religion. Prior to the October Revolution, he worked at the Bozhenko factory. A feeble person, he played the trumpet when factory workers took to the streets to protect their rights. When passers-by wanted to mock his children, they said: “Vaintrob, left, left.” Nobody knew he was a Jew. By present-day standards, it was a troubled family. Galia’s mother was more hard-working than her father.

I visited Galia on Prozorivska Street regularly. Once I noticed her with a rather tall and handsome young man wearing a Nazi uniform. Galia previously mentioned he had fallen in love with her, so I had an opportunity to get acquainted with him personally. One week later, Galia and her mother moved to 97 Gorkoho Street, where her sister Nusia lived with her husband Pavlo who cooperated with the Nazi police. The Chervinskyis, who had two sons, were Galia’s neighbors. Galia was on friendly terms with the elder son, Zhora, but I did not know him well.

## THE DEATH MATCH

On August 8, 1942, Galia told me that Zhora informed her of an upcoming football match scheduled for August 9. Zhora worked at the same bread factory where many “Dynamo” players and representatives of other Kyiv-based football teams were employed. As a big fan of football, the factory’s director sheltered a lot of sportsmen at the factory.

According to Galia, Zhora won Ukraine’s boxing championship in 1940. He told her that our footballers were supposed to play a match against a German team and that they would be shot dead if they won the match. There was absolutely no way we could miss such a match!

There was no public transport in Kyiv. We walked to Gasova Street where “Zenit” stadium was located. The latter was packed: German, Hungarian and Kyiv-based fans were in attendance. When I recall that match, I become so proud of our people who could sacrifice their lives for the benefit of their fatherland. The atmosphere was so emotional at the stadium! Our people were full of contempt for the enemy and showed their great devotion to their native country. We were fearless, chanting slogans to mock the Germans. Most importantly, we were supported by the Hungarians. The Germans were silent. We felt like we were participating in our final and decisive fight.

All fans cheered for our team. If I had had the authority, I would have awarded the “Hero of the Soviet Union” title to the following three players: Trusevych, Klymenko, Kuzmenko. Their performance deserved the title. Thanks to them, our people felt powerful and regained confidence in our ability to defeat the enemy. It happened during the most challenging times.

Later on, when my students asked me about the qualities and skills typical of a person who is capable of performing a feat, I always replied to them that performing a feat required a special moment, as well as the right circumstances and mindset. The most important thing is that such persons must be fully aware of what they are fighting for. And we had the right mindset – our people were defending the fatherland.

Our team won the match 5:3. Needless to say, our enthusiasm faded away when people started to gossip that everyone would be arrested upon leaving the stadium. But it did not happen. The next day Zhora informed me that Trusevych, Kuzmenko and Klymenko were arrested at night. The three of them were ready to put their lives at stake by fighting the Germans on the football field. Nonetheless, they were not supported unanimously. Let’s refrain from condemning other people because everyone is different.

After that match, I became a big fan of football. Another player that comes to mind when I recall our team is Makar Honcharenko. He then reportedly played at “Dynamo” stadium as a left winger during the first matches in 1944. When I moonlighted at the “Arsenal” plant’s night school, Honcharenko’s son was a nine grader. I wrote a note to Makar, asking for a meeting, but he declined to meet. Makar Honcharenko understood his role in that match and never discussed it. He was not one of the heroes.

Quite a lot has been written about the execution of our footballers. I would like to share the stories I heard from Zhora. Our players were held in custody by the Gestapo. On August 20, according to Zhora, Trusevych, Kuzmenko and Klymenko were shot. They first had to fight off the dogs set on them by the Nazis only to be shot afterwards. Another player, Korotkykh, was reportedly shot in September because, apparently, he was a communist. But Zhora never mentioned him.

It would be great if someone could find the Chervinskyi family. I then learned that Zhora was arrested in May 1943 for his connections with the partisan movement.

## UNEXPECTED GUESTS

A few days after the match, when I was returning home with my bunch of planks at about 6 p.m., Mrs. Vaintrob, Galia’s mother, came to us unexpectedly to say that our neighbor Tania Lypnytska and her kids Maika and Alik were in her apartment at 97 Gorkoho Street. She dropped a bombshell because Tania was evacuated back in July 1941, but Mrs. Vaintrob’s unexpected visit took place in August 1942. It turned out that Tania and her family were in Ordzhonikidze when the city was captured by Nazi forces. Tania did not comply with the order issued by the Nazi administration – some people helped her hide away. A Gypsy woman then told her fortune prompting her to get back to Kyiv where Tania’s husband Semen Lypnytskyi, who was allegedly safe, was believed to live. It took Tania a few months to walk from Ordzhonikidze to Kyiv. Feeling scared to enter her apartment, she met Mrs. Vaintrob on Saksahanskoho Street.

My mom and I made potato pancakes and went to Galia’s place. I find it difficult to describe that meeting, which took place under life-threatening conditions. Maika recalled the pancakes all her life because until that day their family had been totally dependent on charity donations within almost six



months. We were supposed to be back home by 9 p.m. to comply with the curfew. We agreed that my mom would meet with them again at 7 a.m. the next day. At 1 a.m. grandma Lysachka knocked on our door to let us know that Tania and her children were in her shed (each family had a small shed). I can hardly describe that horror. We took them to our house.

Later on, we learned that at 10 p.m. Mrs. Vaintrob's son-in-law Pavlo, who cooperated with the Nazi police, returned home and said: "Aunt Tania, I will not give you away, but I don't want them to shoot my family. Leave my house now." It was dark outside and the curfew was in effect. Carrying Alik, she walked along Gorkoho Street until she reached Mytrofanivska Street, and then crossed Chervonoarmiyska Street and knocked on grandma Lysachka's window. The latter opened a small ventilation window (all doors had to remain closed during the curfew), escorted them to her shed and then notified us of Tania's visit.

Her children were dirty and exhausted. My mom decided that they needed to get some rest and take a shower. I decided to take three days off under the pretext that I had to go to the countryside to trade clothes for food. Kovalskyi used to take two eggs as a bribe for allowing our women to take leave from work.

Under the guise of barterers, I was supposed to escort Tania and her children to the village of Roslavychi, where my dad's sister Marika lived, via Khotiv, and then to Vasylkiv, where my mom's brother Mykyta was based, via Hlevakha. Two days later, my mom accompanied us on our way to Khotiv. With ambushes at every quarter, Kyiv was the most horrifying part of the trip. During the first months of occupation, life was less strenuous as the Nazis did not exert total control over the country. Starting from 1942, they knew all the ins and outs.

## TRAVEL AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR LIVES

So, we set off. I often think to myself: Would I ever let my daughter go anywhere if I knew that her life was at risk? And I tend to agree that a person's actions depend on circumstances. We had to rescue people. Tania promised to my mom that, in the event of an ambush, she would say to the police that they were not acquainted. But nothing serious happened. Going off the beaten track, we found Marika's house where we were given some food. She recognized Tania and, despite being aware she was a Jew, accommodated us. The next evening, we reached, via Hlevakha, a place in Vasylkiv where my uncle lived. He was acquainted with Tania and welcomed us cordially. Together with his wife Motria, they made a decision on how to help Tania. The godmother of aunt Motria's children lived in the village of Pinchuky near Bila Tserkva. The next day Motria, Tania and her children set off to Pinchuky.

I safely walked back to Kyiv from Vasylkiv, full of happiness that the trip was over. Tania's last name was changed from "Lupnytska" to "Lypovenko". Maika's new name was "Marusia". My mom visited them quite often because she used to go to the countryside to trade different things for food.

After the liberation of Kyiv from Nazi occupation, the Lypnytskyi family returned to the city in February 1944. They were then informed that their father was killed in action as a hero in early 1944. In that same year, they started to receive social security allowances from the government. Maika became an accountant and was well-esteemed. Alik worked as an automobile company's director.

In real life, just like in a fairy tale, everything is possible. My brother Zhora, Maika and myself were born in the same neighborhood. All of us accumulated a wealth of experience by living through so many



things in life, together with our families. But you cannot run away from your destiny. Nobody could even imagine that Zhora and Maika, who grew up in the same neighborhood, would fall in love with each other, spending the last ten years of their life together. Despite their grown up and married children, they happened to become lonely persons but managed to find each other. Maika died in 2001 and Zhora in 2002.

I communicate with Svitlana, Maika's daughter, on a regular basis. As close friends, Maika and I would often recall all the events we had been through. And we were always surprised that we managed to survive. My biggest question is: How would any mother feel trying to rescue other people putting the lives of her children at stake? Maika would always burst into tears when she recalled her mother putting her hand over the mouth of Alik who was crying in the shed. When Maika told her he could die, her mom responded calmly: "Perhaps, at least you will stay alive." Poor mom! God forbid anything like that should happen again.

## VALIA "THE BOMB"

Upon returning to work, I heard the sad news that Mr. Kovalskyi was leaving us. Two days later, Grinzolik was appointed. Even before his arrival, we had a challenging time, but then the situation aggravated dramatically: it felt like a forced labor camp. I was introduced to a girl who was widely known as Valia "The Bomb" for her cheerful temperament. Rumor had it she was somehow connected with partisan warfare. I established relationships with her. Valia worked at a neighboring company, so I decided to keep an eye on her.

In September, she invited me to her place. Her apartment block was located on Fedorova Street, above the Vatutin Cinema House. During our conversation, she mentioned her connections with partisans, citing their need for medicines and silver for teeth. I was supposed to collect silver. In early October, I brought two silver spoons and five silver coins minted in the Russian Empire. We agreed that I would go to a partisan camp with five people. My mom was well aware of the plan.

Our meeting was scheduled for October 20, 1942. Valia was going to introduce me to a guide. I came to her apartment at the scheduled time, but found no guide in there. We agreed that the guide and Valia would meet me, along with my children, at the designated place the next day. My dad, who urgently came from Barakhty, was supposed to be one of the five people who were going to join me.

And I have to repeat again the word "destiny". Back in the day, people tended to hang their large framed photos on a wall, normally above a chest of drawers. Valia was no exception. I have no idea why, but suddenly I started to take a closer look at her photos. Among other people, I recognized a guy who, wearing his Nazi uniform, once came to Galia Vaintrob on Prozorivska Street. He was pictured, however, wearing Russia's traditional shirt called *kosovorotka*.

Despite being shocked, I was smart enough to understand everything! I called for Valia and, prior to asking her about that guy, I inquired about the other four people. Then I calmly asked who the handsome guy was. She cheerfully replied: "This is my friend." I did not show up at the designated place and, of course, I did not bring anyone there. My mom asked aunt Shura Tolmakh, who lived with her daughter Klava in a neighboring three-story building, to accommodate me at night. Upon my mom's request, Shura agreed to shelter me. She was beyond suspicion, because her husband fell victim to the 1937 purge.

I used to sit behind a cupboard and did not go to work. The next day two SS officers in a black uniform came to our apartment. They were looking for me. My mom told them I went to the countryside to trade things for food. They returned on two occasions, interrogating our neighbors, who had already been instructed by my mom that I allegedly went missing trying to find some food. The SS officers returned yet again one month later. I was hiding at aunt Shura's apartment for four months. My whereabouts were not known to anyone.

On November 6, 1942, when Kyiv was liberated by the Soviet army, an acquaintance of mine, who initially sent me to Galia "The Bomb" and was also supposed to accompany me on our way to a partisan camp, saw NKVD officers arrest her. She turned out to be an agent provocateur.

## THE SECOND WINTER

1942 was the most challenging year both financially and mentally. A lot of people died of hunger. Many were sent to forced labor camps. Amid total hopelessness, we had no information on the ongoing hostilities. The only thing we knew was that the Nazi army occupied the Donbas region. Short videos shown before any movie described their victories. We were unaware that our army succeeded in repelling the Wehrmacht away from Moscow: the capital city was shown to us through the Nazis' binoculars. Our helplessness reached its peak in September when we watched a video showing a Nazi soldier with the Volga River in the background. The Nazis told us they had captured Stalingrad.

But then, on February 3, 1943, Nazi flags were displayed in mourning across Kyiv. At first, we had no idea what was going on, but then we heard some rumors (circulated by the Nazis) that the Soviet army had defeated the Wehrmacht at the Battle of Stalingrad. We were full of happiness and joy! From late February to mid-April, Italian soldiers retreated through Kyiv. We already knew they had arbitrarily left the front, moving in groups of 10-20 fully equipped soldiers. Showing their disrespect for them, the Nazis, however, did not obstruct the retreating Italians. The latter would go to the market to buy something. Being fully aware that they were marching all the way from Stalingrad, our people shared their food with them, giving away all the bread they used to sell in slices. Surprisingly, I have never read about it, but those events did take place.

Starting from the spring of 1942, the Nazi administration began to ration bread in 0.5 kg slices per person, but the overall quality of that bread was very poor. I doubt they added any type of flour (at least rye flour). We were unable to talk as we were chewing it. Otherwise, that bread would fall out of your mouth. It was made mostly from barley and skillfully baked in boxes. Covered with its golden crust, the bread was rolled in millet husks. In the bread boxes, one could find barley and other crumbs. Finding the crumbs would bring so much happiness to many of us! My mom, just like she did before, went to the countryside seeking to barter things for food. Poor mom, she had to walk so far... And she was supposed to take care of us. My dad was hiding away, just like me. We were looking for a solution. As usual, my mother found one.

We lived in apartment block number 127. Osynevych, a very wealthy and mysterious person, lived in block number 125. He built a house for his daughters next to our block, on Mytrofanivska Street. One could get from Chervonoarmiyska Street to Mytrofanivska Street through a garden. He used to accommodate the Nazis quite often and made friends with them. I cannot explain what was going on there. But even today one can find a huge monument, erected by the Soviet authorities above the church at the Baikove cemetery, with the following inscription: "To the talented inventor..."

Apartment block number 123 was half-empty. It was a two-story extended part of the building, which was as wide as the backyard. A driveway to that extension ran through the entrance to the building. An iron gate blocked access to that area, with just three people living in the extended building. There was no on-site manager. Two out of three families that used to live on the second floor evacuated. A small 14-square-meter room accommodated Nadia and her husband. It was part of a shared apartment and it was difficult to heat it properly.

My mom suggested that Nadia move in to our well-heated one-bedroom apartment in exchange for her apartment. Most importantly, it had two entrances: the front one to Chervonoarmiyska Street, and the back entrance to the yard. One could hardly find a better solution!

We celebrated New Year together. Nobody could see us, and we did not see anyone. My mother learned how to make home-distilled vodka, which was our safety tool. She managed to establish reliable relationships with a few Nazi collaborators who would alert us to any raid or danger. It was possible to get to Osynevych's garden through the back entrance.

Aside from home-distilled vodka, my mom also learned how to make household soap. Even today I cannot figure out where she managed to find fat and sodium hydroxide. Soon afterwards, we found another source of income. Using parachute silk sold by the Hungarians, we produced headscarves adding bright colors, which were also purchased from the Hungarians. My task was to trim and fringe the garments. I was very proficient at performing my duties. Our headscarves were very beautiful yet impractical as the colors would quickly fade in the sunlight. In the village of Barakhty, where my aunt lived, all women used to wear our headscarves. My mom would re-dye the garments every 1-2 months, so they were satisfied.

We had no troubles until March. My dad gradually started to communicate with our neighbors. As mentioned above, there were no traitors after the first year of occupation. Everyone was waiting for our army. My father wore a moustache and big beard. Few people who knew him before the war would be able to recognize him. Together with my younger brother Sasha, they got a job at the First Footware Factory located close to the Lavra in Kyiv's Pechersk district. They would walk to work along Volodymyro-Lybid'ska Street.



[Photo: Sofia Yarova and Borys Hlazunov]

## HIRING TRICK

The Yeresko family lived on Zamiska Street. They had a private house and plow horse. By the way, 80% of Kyiv's territory between "Ukraine" Palace and the Dzerzhinsky Plant was dotted with privately owned one-story houses. The son-in-law of Semen Yeresko's brother was a *Volksdeutsche*, who worked in our district as a slaughterhouse vet. He was a nice person, helping other people a lot. When Nazi forces started to retreat, he left the city out of fear. But he was then allowed to return because he did nothing wrong. Almost all people who lived on our street, myself included, reached out to him for help. Thanks to him, Nadia Yeresko, Semen's daughter, got a job as a courier at an employment center, which shared the same building with Kyiv's Institute of Arts.

Yeresko's two sons served as officers in the Soviet army. Pavlo, the younger one, had the military rank of major when the war ended, and the elder one, a very noble and handsome man, was a colonel. The latter served in Zhukov's unit and was even present at the ceremony when the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany was signed. He died, however, after the war, in July 1945.

Once my dad told us the plant was hiring staff. My mom then went to the Yeresko family, and they agreed that Nadia Yeresko (who was one year younger than I) and I would go to the employment center and Nadia was supposed to secretly leave my documents there. My mom needed at least two hearts to be strong enough to survive four hours of waiting. We had to walk through the entire city. I had no documents but we were lucky to get back home. A *Fräulein* at the employment center was well acquainted with Nadia (who worked as a courier) and issued my work permit without any additional questions, which was my biggest concern. My current *Ausweis* was valid until October, so I was very grateful to Nadia. We became longtime friends afterwards, and following Nadia's death I regularly came to her gravesite to pay tribute to her.

It seemed like things were looking up. The three of us went to work without apprehension. I was tasked with making shoe hills. The owner of the factory, Mr. Miller, was a very decent person who belonged to the "old" German generation. He cared a lot about other people and could speak Russian. Mr. Miller

never ill-treated anyone and always greeted all workers, unlike our Russian director. The latter was such a bastard! We called Mr. Miller “The Boss”. Being humane in such a horrible time was almost an exploit!

Lunch was provided in exchange for ration cards. One could find almost everything on the plate: potatoes, beet roots, turnips, beans, noodles. Our meals were nonetheless quite large and energy-dense, which was the most important thing at the time. In addition, they also gave us a 200 g slice of bread, which we would bring home. On Saturdays, foremen and workers would also get two outsoles, which was equivalent to a loaf of bread.

Then yet another misfortune happened. In May 1943, full-scale mobilization of the labor force was announced. Everyone was supposed to be “purged”. All surnames were grouped in alphabetical order, with checks scheduled every three-day period for people whose surnames began with the relevant letter. During the first three days, the following letters were scheduled: “А”, “Б”, “В”, “Г”, “Д”. I was part of the first group. These events happened in late May 1943.

I went to the employment center where people were standing in a quite long line already. One had to pass four checks, including a medical examination. I successfully completed all the checks. I remember the happy eyes of a *Fräulein* who gave me a ticket and permit authorizing work in Germany. She congratulated me and presented a small bunch of violets made of fabric. Little did she know what I was wishing her at that very moment! At home everyone was in mourning. I was scheduled to go to Germany exactly one week after the checks, on Wednesday, at 1 p.m. The next day, on Thursday, I went to work.

I was the only worker who had been ordered to leave for Germany. Having received two pairs of shoes, my co-workers started to bid farewell. Suddenly, Mr. Yatchenko, a workshop supervisor whose five sons were fighting on the frontline and the youngest one was working with him at the plant, said to me: “Sonia, turn up for work, we’ll keep fighting”.

I was so happy to hear those words. I was a very modest and hard-working girl. Everyone liked me. I am not bragging. Yatchenko managed to find somewhere a small but quite high workbench, which was used by him to seam shoe heels with the help of thin wire. It took me about three hours to reach the desired outcome. In the afternoon, Yatchenko went to our foreman seeking protection of my job because I was “a very valuable worker”. All my co-workers at the workshop held their breath. It was a very hard moment both for my parents and myself! Those minutes felt like an eternity.

On Tuesday, the foreman returned to work with an exemption. I can hardly express my happiness. We were unaware of the Battle of Kursk, but we knew Nazi forces were retreating. It was also well known that the Wehrmacht failed to capture Moscow and that our army succeeded in protecting Stalingrad. However, we had no idea when our territories would be liberated.

## HARBINGERS OF VICTORY

In early September 1943, in a single night the Nazis shot all communists, as well as ailing and disabled people who were unable to evacuate. During the first days of occupation, all communists were ordered to register with the Nazi authorities who guaranteed their safety as long as they checked in to a local commandant’s office on a monthly basis. The occupants did not disturb us for a certain period of time. Needless to say, my dad did not get registered. We had to live in anxiety every day and every night.

Being hopeful of the upcoming liberation, no one wanted to die. German entrepreneurs discontinued their businesses.

Don Cossacks, along with their families, were retreating via Kyiv for three days, carrying their belongings. They had to evacuate because they knew our people would not forgive them for all the crimes they had committed in collaboration with the Nazis. I can clearly remember young Donian men and women wearing a grey Nazi uniform with red shoulder straps.

On September 18, 1943, I turned 18. When I reported to work, I learned that our boss was leaving the plant. All valuable things were removed from the plant, but he authorized the distribution of “civilian” ready-to-wear shoes among all the workers. It was a very valuable gift. The three of us made sure to considerably stock up on shoes. If I am not mistaken, we had 20 pairs of women’s ankle boots. My father managed to get some fabric from the boss. We then gifted the shoes to all our relatives and friends.

We heard rumors that the bread factory’s director was also leaving. It was then that our people hit the largest jackpot during the entire occupation period. We had two sacks of flour. What a luxury! A few days later, a new order was issued: people who lived close to the Dnieper in Kyiv’s Pechersk district had to move beyond the even-numbered side of Chervonoarmiyska Street. Kyiv residents who dared to cross the street were to be shot. At that moment, we were well aware that the Soviet army had reached the Dnieper.

We were quite lucky. Uncle Petro, my mom’s brother, passed away being unable to tolerate the atrocities at Babyn Yar. His wife Galia and her nephew Zhora resided at 127 Gorkoho Street. We moved to that address. A lot of people lived there, which was for the benefit of all: the Nazis could not control everyone amid all the fuss that was going on. People settled in the burial vaults of the Baikove cemetery. After October 15, civilians were forcibly transported to Germany. Those who resisted the order were shot.

The Soviet army was stationed on the left bank of the Dnieper. The odd-numbered side of Chervonoarmiyska Street was dotted with artillery weapons. A huge gun was located in a park next to “Ukraine” Palace.

Our neighborhood lived like a small community. Everyone had some flour. About 50 liters of moonshine was distilled for Nazi collaborators. From our yard, one could get to Chervonoarmiyska Street leading to the Volodymyrskyi Market. Each of us had a small backpack with food and a hideout which was supposed to be used in the event of a raid.

Shura Tolmakh and her daughter Klava, who sheltered me when I was hiding away from the Gestapo, lived with us. In addition, three former Nazi collaborators also took shelter in our apartment. My mother helped as many people as possible. When full-scale mobilization was announced in May 1943, using her connection with a Nazi collaborator, she helped three boys from the village of Barakhty, where my dad was hiding, to get a job in the police as dog handlers. The following people lived in our apartment at 123 Chervonoarmiyska Street: Aliosha, a prisoner of war from the Volga region who joined one of the families in the village, Kolia Klymenko who was younger than I, and Sergiy Tymoshenko.

We got along quite well. When forced deportation was initiated, they ran away from the police and settled in our apartment at 127 Gorkoho Street. The Kaganovich district police office was headquartered close to Kyiv’s Roman Catholic Church. Today few people would be able to recall that a large pillbox,



with machine guns sticking out of its loopholes, was built on the left-hand side of a yard adjacent to the church. There was an underground passage leading to a neighboring house located at the back of the yard. Shrouded in my headscarf, I would walk through the passage to check if the police were still there. They left on October 19.



*[Photo: Search Service. This 1929 photo was provided by **Sofia Hryhorivna Boiko**, the Righteous Among the Nations, the third-class Order of Merit awardee and Head of the Association of the Righteous of Babyn Yar. Pictured above are children who lived in the neighborhood at 127 Chervonoarmiyska Street.*

**1<sup>st</sup> row:** *Tosia Vaintrob, Zhora and Sonia Boiko, Lilia Hrishyna, Galia Vaintrob (lived under occupation and then went to the front), Zhenia Hrishyna, Semen Barash (murdered at Babyn Yar).*

**2<sup>nd</sup> row:** *Boria Vaintrob, Tolia Vaintrob (imprisoned, worked at an airport during the occupation period, hanged by the Nazis, unidentified person, Klava Golovinska, Galia Hrishyna, unidentified person.*

**Center:** *Boris Hrishyn (killed in action in February 1944, had the military rank of major.)*

## MY SECOND BIRTHDAY

SS officers were constantly hunting for people. Rather than forcibly deporting them, the Nazis began to escort detainees directly to Kyiv's Syrets district where mass shootings took place. There were no people on the street, with just a security guard patrolling the gate, a warning of imminent danger.

October 23 was our second birthday. At 7 a.m., all of a sudden, when no security guards were on duty, two SS officers walked into our yard. They arrested me, along with my mom, brother Sasha, aunt Shura and Klava. We knew it was the end. They escorted us to Kyiv's cargo railway station. Surrounded by dead silence, there was no one around us within a 200 m radius. Holding their breath, a few people kept an eye on us through a crack. But we were not destined to die.

Wearing their black uniform, the SS officers were dreadful, angry and atrocious, looking exactly the way they are portrayed in movies. Suddenly, near Police Park, two drunken young Nazi soldiers showed up, exclaiming: "Where is schnapps?" My mom replied very loudly: "Mister, we do have schnapps!" One of the SS officers dealt my mom a mighty blow. The soldiers (who returned from the frontline wearing a green uniform) ran up to us upon hearing my mom's words. As the SS officers were beating her, my mom kept repeating she had schnapps. A brawl erupted between the Nazis, with the soldiers pointing their assault rifles at the SS officers.

And there we were again – walking home down the empty street. I can hardly describe the happiness and joy of people who never expected to see us again because they thought we were sentenced to death. My dad cried his heart out. We gave the German soldiers two 3.5-liter barrels of moonlight. They shared our joy and, being unable to understand everything we were talking about, said upon leaving us: "Hitler kaput".

We knew that a changing of the guard on the Baikovy Bridge took place between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. All our family, aunt Shura and Klava, aunt Galia and Zhora, and three Nazi police collaborators\* managed to get to the road to Vasylkiv. Four hours later, we reached the village of Roslavychi where my dad's sister Marika lived. These events took place on October 26, 1943.

*\* The fate of the Nazi police collaborators was quite interesting. My mother went to a KGB office, together with the three of them, to disclose that they collaborated with the Nazi administration and to explain the reason why they chose to do that. All of them were immediately enlisted in the army. I know for sure that people who never committed any crimes against the Soviet people during the occupation period were not punished. It was, however, contingent upon the prosecutor and the judge. Sometimes the judges would not consider the case properly. Aliosha never sent any letters. Needless to say, he was reluctant to hear about the past because he became a prisoner of war in 1941. Kolia Klymenko led a*



*decent life upon returning from the front. Sergiy Tymoshenko was unlucky. As a junior lieutenant, he was killed in action when the Soviet army was liberating Budapest.*

My aunt was not really happy to see us because she had to have enough food to accommodate as many as eleven people. Because her food supplies were too scarce for the guests, she suggested that we collect potatoes, which were left after the mechanic harvesting of fields. Our daily haul was a sack of potatoes, beetroots and cabbage which we would collectively bring home. As a result, we always had potato borscht on our table.

In early November, a huge fire was visible far away – Kyiv was set ablaze. During those troubled times, all of us had a hideout in the event of a raid. Our village was located far from the road to Vasylkiv (about 20 km south of Kyiv). We could hear ongoing fighting. On November 6, at noon, a disorganized group of Nazi soldiers marched through the village. We were very frightened but they just passed by.

On the morning of November 7, my dad took the center of the house to proclaim solemnly: “Comrades, let me congratulate you on October Revolution Day and Liberation Day!” We even tried to hush him so that he could not put a jinx on that.

At about 2 p.m., I went to the well, which was located far from our house, to get some water. Suddenly, I noticed a group of soldiers behind the trees. When one of them asked if I was waiting for them, I was speechless and I just nodded, being overwhelmed with happiness. In the evening, Soviet officer Ivan Ivanovich Mykhailov with his soldiers came to our house to stay overnight. All of them were Russian, except for one soldier who was from Georgia. Finally! The soldiers were trying to catch up with their military unit. On the morning of November 8, they were supposed to return to Kyiv. There was a car left in the nearby forest. Some Kyiv residents once drove it there from the city. We got in that car and set off home.

*[Dear mom Sonia!*

*Congratulations on achieving another milestone – the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

*Your 78-year-old orphan boy.*

*Lionia Larin.*

*18.09.2015]*

## CONTEMPORARIES ON SOFIA YAROVA

“A Great Person”

*Avraam,*

*Federation of the Jewish Communities of Ukraine*

I would like to tell you how I got acquainted with a wonderful person whose name was Sofia Hryhorivna Yarova. In 2020, acting at the request of the Rabbi, who was Head of the Kyiv Jewish Community, and on behalf of the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Ukraine, we provided humanitarian assistance to veterans and Jews who survived the war. Sofia Hryhorivna was one of them. Our brief encounter with her is still deeply engraved in my memory, although many people we come across leave no trace in our lives. But from time to time the impression from meeting some really great people cannot be forgotten.

At the time, we were not familiar with the recipients of assistance. Looking at the list of names and addresses, we were pressed for time as we had to reach out to all those people. That's why veterans' happy faces would flash, with no possibility for us to make small talk with them, although each of those people had a lot to say. But it was impossible to pass by Sofia Hryhorivna's apartment.

She greeted us cordially at the doorstep, emanating brightness and energy. It cannot be explained, you can only understand it when you see such a cheerful and charismatic person. Sofia Yarova filled us with optimism. Our conversation lasted for about two minutes, but we will always remember our meeting: you've got one in a million chance to see such people who live a bright and eventful life, bringing brightness and joy to everyone. At the age of 95, her cheerfulness and positive energy were so powerful. One can only imagine the “tsunami” of goodness and optimism she used to radiate when she was young.

Thanks to such angels, our planet rotates on its axis. Unfortunately, we then learned that her brightness faded out and there would be no possibility for us to talk to Sofia Hryhorivna again. But the two-minute conversation with her will keep our batteries charged for the rest of our lives.

Roksana Hamarnyk

*President of the Jewish Forum of Ukraine*

*Head of the Jewish Fund of Ukraine*

We got acquainted with Sofia Hryhorivna in the early 1990s, when I worked under the supervision of Illia Levitas and Arkadiy Monastyrskyi. She had a wonderful voice which made her singing brilliant. With her haircut, makeup and charisma, she was a woman until the last breath. She always cherished the memory of all the challenging times during the Second World War her family and herself had gone through.

Sofia Yarova worked as a school teacher, sharing her inner core with pupils who were in awe of her. I was invited to her birthday, along with other guests including her pupils. I saw their respect for her and their friendly and warm relationships.

As the Head of the Association of the Righteous Among the Nations, until the end of her life she took part in our annual memorial ceremony “Six Million Hearts” dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. When Sofia Yarova took the stage, she always recalled those horrible times and the feat accomplished by our people. She always emphasized the importance of averting similar tragedies in the future. Our event normally took place at the Pillar Hall of Kyiv’s city administration building, with a flight of stairs in the hallway. Even at the age of 90, Sofia Hryhorivna climbed the stairs, which was another indication of how strong-willed she was.

She cherished her friendship with Illia Levitas and Arkadiy Monastyrskyi and held Borys Hlazunov in high esteem.

I am privileged to know Sofia Hryhorivna’s family and, in particular, her wonderful and talented daughter Hanna Yarova, who is her look-alike, as well as her gifted husband and son. It’s a brilliant family.

Oleksandr Dukhovnyi

*Chief Rabbi of the Reform Communities of Ukraine*

One of my favorite expressions that determines the essence of human nature is: “A wise person keeps learning from everyone.” To me, Sofia Yarova was a person who taught me how to be kind, humane and worthy of being the Individual. In Yiddish, such a person is called “Amensh”. Our friendship with her was of great importance to me because my mom, Fania Dukhovna, was rescued in the village of Ruzhyn by the Ukrainian family of Agafia and Fedir Volynets.

When I got acquainted with Sofia Hryhorivna, my mom was no longer alive. Sofia Yarova was a lifeline for my mom, thereby bringing me to life. We are like new branches on a tree trunk.

Sofia Yarova was not only a teacher and wise person. She taught me how to be wise, saying a lot of kind words not about herself, but about the other Righteous Among the Nations who are oftentimes neglected by the government. She would also mention that Kyiv still had no street or avenue named after the Righteous Among the Nations.

She cared a lot about the well-being of old age people who were in need of financial support, nursing and attention. With her passion for life, she was a role model for many, exemplifying the way we should love our lives and care about people. The Talmud reads: “Love God in people.” Sofia Yarova loved people a lot and may her memory be a blessing.

Yulia Goldenberg

*Founder and Chair of the Board of the All-Ukrainian Charitable Fund "To You"*

A real woman... Her posture was indicative of a strong-willed personality and unyielding spirit hiding behind her beauty and femininity. At the age of over 90, she dared to put on a red dress, which never looked vulgar. It just suited her.

Sofia Hryhorivna reminded me of my grandmother. She would never look neglected, even in front of a delivery man. "I am a woman", said the 90-year-old woman with a smile.

Sofia Yarova never asked anything for herself. She was always concerned about other people's needs, including her pupils, acquaintances, the Righteous Among the Nations and their children, friends... And at that very moment she was just unstoppable. Like a bloodhound, she would search everywhere, tracing all her contacts and overcoming all the barriers... And much needed support was found.

Being physically intolerant of injustice, she was unable to pass by. If Sofia Yarova witnessed injustice of any kind, she didn't care about the ranks of government officials (be it a mayor, the Prime Minister or even the President of Ukraine) when reaching out to them to articulate, in an open, sincere and clear way, the things that were to be changed and the persons who were to be commended or reprimanded.

I will never forget Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to an exhibition organized by my fund. Amid complete silence in the hall, Sofia Yarova suddenly exclaimed: "Sweetie, I'm so happy to see you. Let me tell you everything." And she started to tell her story. Although the President had just a few minutes, he did not end the conversation. Rather, he talked to her, listening attentively to what she was saying... At that very moment, he promised to provide a lifetime presidential allowance to the Righteous Among the Nations, which was introduced afterwards, but Sofia Hryhorivna passed away and never received one.

She dreamed about a modern museum at Babyn Yar and about people who would respect each other. She believed in real Kyivans who "would unite as part of the entire apartment block or street to rescue Jews during the Second World War", asking us to learn from their experience and mistakes.

She was an extraordinary hero and wonderful woman, mother and grandmother, although she considered herself neither a hero nor a VIP person. It is such a privilege to have met such a personality.

Borys Hlazunov

*Director of the National Preserve “Babyn Yar”*

Illia Levitas, the then President of the Council of National Communities of Ukraine, President of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, and Head of “Memory of Babyn Yar” and “Memory of the Victims of Fascism in Ukraine” Foundations, introduced me to Sofia Hryhorivna. She was Head of the Association of the Righteous Among the Nations, Righteous of Ukraine and Righteous of Babyn Yar, and I worked as Director of the National Historical and Memorial Preserve “Babyn Yar”, a new entity established by the government.

A teacher by profession and a person of great kindness, spirituality, brightness and wisdom, Sofia Hryhorivna reserved the best place in my soul and heart. She was a brilliant speaker. Her stories about things she had gone through left a mark on everyone.

As a young woman, she took part in the defense of Kyiv. During the Nazi occupation of Ukraine, listening to the call of their hearts, Sofia and her mother risked their lives to rescue Jews from extermination.

After the war, as a school teacher and director, she educated hundreds of pupils who remember how kind and humane she was. She always helped people, being part of the legendary generation of creative and hard-working people who, despite all the challenges in their lives, managed to build a beautiful country for us.

I remember dozens of speeches by Sofia Hryhorivna at various memorial events dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust and Babyn Yar, and her active participation in meetings of the Steering Committee for the Preparation and Organization of Events in Commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Babyn Yar Tragedy in 2016.

In the spring of 2016, Kyiv’s Pecherskyi District authorities were going to evict a few civic organizations from the ground floor of a building at 7 Nimanska Street, including, without limitation, the All-Ukrainian Jewish Council, the Association of the Righteous Among the Nations, Righteous of Ukraine and Righteous of Babyn Yar, “Heroism and the Holocaust” Museum, and “*The Jewish News*” editorial office.

At a meeting of the Steering Committee, which took place on May 11, 2016 at the grand hall of the Cabinet of Ministers building, Sofia Hryhorivna escalated the issue to Volodymyr Groysman, the Committee’s Co-Head and the Prime Minister of Ukraine. Volodymyr Borysovyh immediately instructed one of his aides to call the Head of Kyiv’s Pecherskyi District State Administration to solve the issue. The ejection was postponed for a couple of years.

Sofia Hryhorivna also expressed her gratitude to the attendees for transferring the building located at 44 Melnykova Street, which was once the office of the Jewish cemetery (1894), to the state property. The building remains the only local landmark that witnessed the Babyn Yar tragedy during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine in 1941-1943. She was also grateful for the initiative to build an alley of the Righteous in the territory of the preserve.

During an external meeting of the Steering Committee, which took place on September 13, 2016 in the territory of the National Historical and Memorial Preserve “Babyn Yar”, where large-scale preparations were ongoing, Sofia Hryhorivna approached the Prime Minister again. Upon seeing her, Volodymyr Borysovyh said: “I’ve done everything you asked me to do.” “Yes, thank you. You are a man of your

word”, replied Sofia Yarova. “But the republican hospital for veterans in the village of Tsybli, Pereyaslavskyi District, needs urgent assistance (protection from destruction – Ed.)”. “Consider it done”, responded Volodymyr Groysman.

Sofia Yarova praised Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko: “Thank you for your skillful selection of staff. Your deputy Starostenko A.V. and Popova D.O., Head of the Department of Culture at the Kyiv City State Administration, are very helpful in preparation for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy. They should be commended.”

That’s how Sofia Hryhorivna lived. She always contributed to state affairs and helped other people to the extent possible.

On the tragic day of September 29, when we commemorate the victims of the Babyn Yar massacre, the rescuer of Babyn Yar victims passed away.

May she rest in peace.



**Boiko Frosyna Trokhymivna**

**Yarova Sofia Hryhorivna**

The "Righteous of Babyn Yar" title is hereby bestowed upon you in recognition of your exploits and with eternal gratitude for your Christian mercy and kindness when rescuing Kyiv's Jews who were sentenced to death at Babyn Yar during the challenging times of the war, putting your lives and the lives of your family members at risk.

The Jewish people will always remember your noble exploits and transfer your names from generation to generation as an example of how humane and united our two nations are.

The Ukrainian people, whose privileged daughters you are, can be proud of you.

We bow our heads to you.

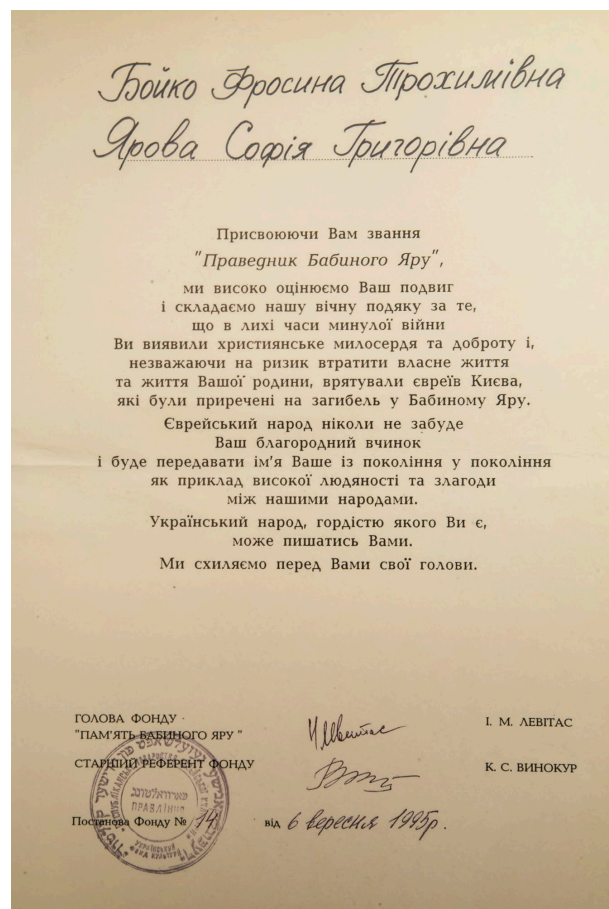
Head of "Memory of Babyn Yar" Foundation

I.M. Levitas

Senior Secretary of the Foundation

K.S. Vynokur

Resolution of the Foundation No. 14 dated September 6, 1995





## Certificate of Honor

This is to certify that, on September 7, 1997, at a meeting of the Commission for Awarding the "Righteous Among the Nations" Title, as established by the World Holocaust Remembrance Center "Yad Vashem", based on the evidence provided, Yefrosinia Boiko and her daughter Sofia Yarova were awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" title and medal for risking their lives to rescue Jews who were persecuted during the period of fascist occupation. Their names will be engraved on the wall of honor in Yad Vashem's Avenue of the Righteous.

Jerusalem, Israel

September 23, 1997





Sofia Yarova  
Memoirs  
My Life Under Occupation  
Word of the Righteous  
Kyiv, Ukraine  
2022

Photos from Sofia Yarova's family archives

The "Word of the Righteous" project

Historical photos of Kyiv: courtesy of Mykhailo Kalnytskyi

Editors: Margarita Ormotsadze, Olga Halchynska, Daria Kolesnyk

Design: Kostiantyn Palamarchuk