

My father and my family

V L Ginzburg

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Abstract. In what proved to be his last paper, Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg gives some autobiographical information about his family tree, relatives, ancestors, and descendants and where the name Ginzburg comes from. A major part of V L Ginzburg's memoir is about his father — making up for what he considered to be a 'somewhat neglected' filial duty.

When I came across the book *About My Father — With Love*,¹ I immediately wished to take part in its anticipated sequels. Why? The thing is, I have for many years now had this nagging feeling that I failed to fulfil my filial duty towards my father. And I wish to repent. Alas, the staunch atheist that I am, I cannot hope, as a religious person would, that my repentance will be heard 'up there'. However, we repent for our own sake, not for someone else's.

My feelings will be easier to understand if I add that my mother died when I was only four years of age, I had no brothers or sisters and was thus an only son, and on top of it, I was born when my father was already 53 years old. He desperately wanted to have a son and truly doted on me. Sadly, I did not understand it well enough when I grew older; this probably caused him much pain.

My mother's death did not lead to the arrival — very typical in such cases — of a stepmother and what could be a pretty unpleasant life for a child in a broken home. In fact, my mother had an unmarried sister about five years her junior — my Aunt Roza, who some time later came to live with us — that is, with my dad and me.

I did not understand that at the time, but clearly Aunt Roza became father's second wife. Actually, they did not marry officially in those years of hardships for some property-connected reasons unknown to me. Aunt Roza worked for many years in Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga (International Books) — an organization that managed the acquisition of foreign publications from abroad for research establishments and individual scientists.

¹ Collected reminiscences *About My Father — With Love* (compiled by A Fin) (Moscow: Joint Editorial Office of the journal *Yunyi Tekhnik*, 2008) 224 pp.



Photo 1. Sisters Wildauer: Roza Veniaminovna Wildauer (left to right: Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg's Aunt Roza, who replaced his mother Avgusta after her death) and Avgusta Veniaminovna Wildauer (mother of Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg; married surname Wildauer-Ginzburg).

Both my mother and my aunt were born in Latvia, in a town called Mitava,² which is possibly known under a different name now. Their father was a watchmaker, i.e., he repaired and perhaps sold watches. I need to note here that after the 1917 revolution the family remained in Latvia. In

² Mitava (Jelgava in Latvian, Mitau in German) — a provincial center of the Courland (Kurland) Province of the Russian Empire, former capital of the Duchy of Courland 607 verst (648 km) from Saint Petersburg. After 1917, the town name was changed to Jelgava. (*Editor's note.*)

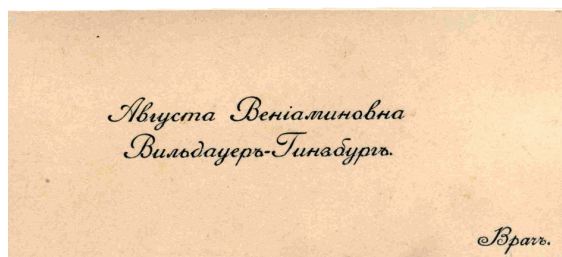


Photo 2. Spouses Avgusta Veniaminovna Wildauer-Ginzburg and Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg. The photograph, dated 5 October 1914, and a calling card from Dr. A V Wildauer (after marrying on 19 December 1914 her surname was changed to Wildauer-Ginzburg).



Photo 3. The earliest photograph of Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg taken at the age of about twelve months.

fact, grandmother did pay us a visit once, in 1924 or perhaps in 1926, but after this all connections with ‘lands abroad’ were severed. I only know that in Latvia mother and aunt had, in addition to a father and mother, a brother and a sister (who was ill). In all likelihood, all of them perished during the German occupation. My mother and aunt both moved to Russia proper even before the revolution, and in 1911 mother graduated from the Kharkov Medical Institute (University) as a medical doctor.

I forgot to mention that my mother’s and aunt’s surname was Wildauer, so when mother married in 1914 she changed it to a double-barrelled surname, Wildauer-Ginzburg, as was normal for practising doctors. The following episode is relevant here. When mother fell ill in 1916, my father invited a well-known medical professor to visit her at our home. When leaving the house, the doctor refused to accept the fee and irritably requested father not to invite him in the future. He did that because the plaque on the entrance door said “Wildauer-Ginzburg, MD”. Well, there was an unwritten rule that one doctor does not charge another for a visit.

It is only natural that during the war and the revolution my mother worked in a hospital; she died in that hospital in 1920 of spotted fever. My father was on a business trip at the time and could not help appreciably, while her colleagues in

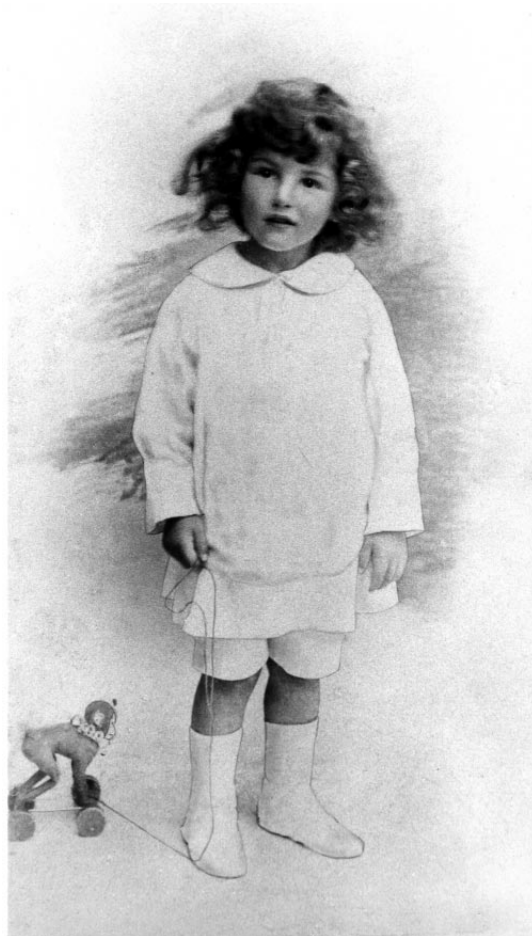


Photo 4. Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg at the age of 2 years 9 months and 17 days. The note on the back of the photo, written in the hand of Lazar Efimovich (father of V L Ginzburg), says: “Born on 21 September 1916 (7 Tishrei of the year 5677). Photographed for the 2nd time on 21 July 1919 (23 Tamuz of the year 5679).” (Date of birth is given in old style calendar, the photo is dated in new style, and both dates in parentheses are given by Ginzburg the father according to the Jewish calendar. — *Editor’s note.*)

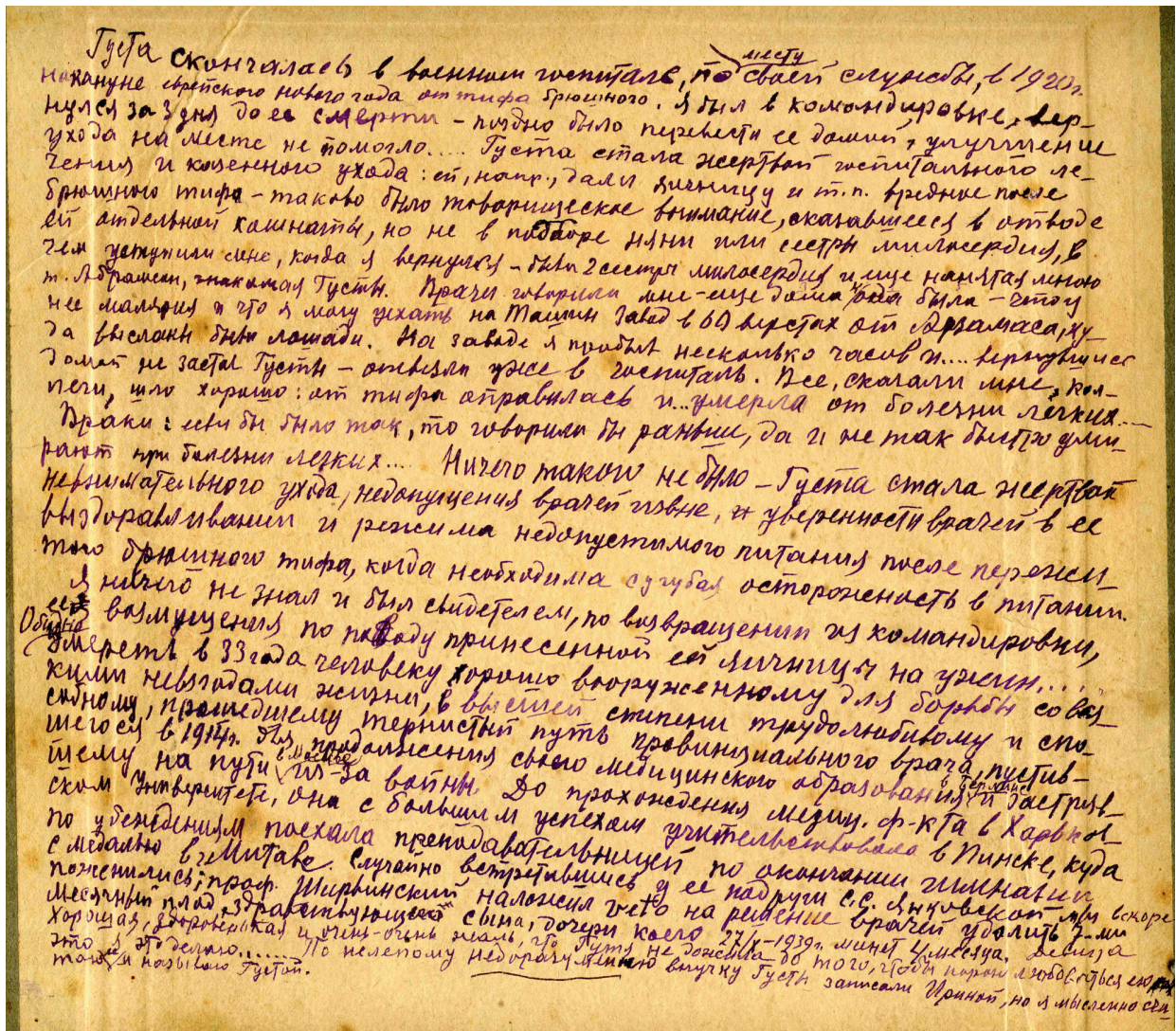


Photo 5. Written on the back of the photograph of the mother's (Avgusta Veniaminovna's) grave (see further photo 24) in the hand of the father Lazar Efimovich are the circumstances of Avgusta Veniaminovna's death (perhaps specially for his son Vitaly): "Gusta has died of spotted fever on the eve of the Jewish New Year in the military hospital where she was working in 1920. I was away on a business trip and returned three days before her death—it was too late to take her home and improved nursing in the hospital did not help.... Gusta became a victim of the hospital's way of treating patients and of indifferent nursing: e.g., she was given fried eggs and other things that are harmful after typhus—her colleagues made sure she would get a personal ward but did not choose a good nurse or a sister of charity for her; they gave in when I insisted following my return—two sisters of charity were assigned, plus I hired another, Gusta's acquaintance Ms. Abramson. Doctors told me—while she was still at home—that she had malaria and that it was all right for me to travel to the Tashin factory sixty versts from Arzamas to which horses had already been sent. I spent several hours at the factory but... on my return home I did not find Gusta there—she had already been moved to the hospital. Her colleagues assured me that everything was going fine: she was cured of typhus and... died of a pulmonary disease.... It was all a lie: were it true, they would have told me earlier, and pulmonary illnesses do not kill so rapidly.... Nothing of the sort—Gusta was the victim of negligent care, exclusion of doctors from outside the hospital, cocksureness of doctors that she would recover, unacceptable nutrition after the spotted fever instead of utmost prudence in feeding the patient. I was kept in the dark and witnessed, after my return from the business trip, her indignation when she was given fried eggs at suppertime.... It pains me to think of the death at the age of 33 of a person well equipped to resist all sorts of adversities, with excellent abilities and willing to work hard, who was able to overcome the thorny path of a provincial doctor who in 1914 set on the road to Berlin to continue her medical education but was stranded in Moscow because of the war. Before graduating from the medical department of Kharkov University, she had had a successful teacher's career in Pinsk where she had gone to work as a convinced volunteer after graduation (*cum laude*) from a gymnasium in Mitava. We met accidentally in the house of her friend S S Yankovskaya and soon got married; Prof. Shirvinskii vetoed other doctors' decision to abort the seven-month-old fetus of my now healthy son, whose daughter will be four months old on 27/X 1939. The girl is sweet and healthy, and it is such a terrible, terrible pity that Gusta did not live to enjoy seeing her once in a while as I do.... It was through a stupid misunderstanding that the name of Gusta's granddaughter was recorded as Irina, but I think of her as Gusta and address her as Gusta...." (It is clear from the text that L E Ginzburg wrote this note in October 1939. — *Editor's note.*)

the hospital acted below par. Aunt Roza also attended the medical institute, planning to become a dentist, but never reached that stage and, as I had a chance to mention, worked at Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga using her knowledge of foreign languages.

Unfortunately, I have a poor memory, so I do not remember myself before I reached the age of four. In fact, I

remember only two events even at that age. I can see my mother lying in bed, she is obviously ill, and I am stroking her hair. My other memory is of my mother's funeral. We lived at 29 Myasnikskaya Street, next to the well-known Filippov's bakery, or one of its shops. I see myself standing on the sidewalk with my nanny, while the funeral procession, with my father in the midst, passes by. That was mother's funeral.



Photo 6. A portion of the first page of the patent (known at the time as a 'privilege') of mechanical engineer Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg for an apparatus for water purification (application submitted on 30 May 1900).

My next memory is of myself at about eight; for instance, I remember V I Lenin's funeral, which was in 1924. On the whole, what I can recall of my early childhood is very little but the feeling is that I was a well-cared-for and much loved boy.

Now about my father. He was born in the Belorussian town of Mogilev in 1863. Obviously, this happened only two years after peasants were released from serfdom and became free. This was approximately 150 years ago but the distance does not appear very large when compared with the age of modern science which emerged, roughly, in the 17th century. Suffice it to remember that not only did aviation not exist, but neither did radio, let alone television, and you realize that life in 1863 was drastically different from the modern way of life, at least in the cities, and so was life in science, technology, and medicine.

My father was obviously a gifted man. That was a time when a Jew faced huge barriers to entering a university; at any rate, one had to sit for fairly serious exams. Well, my father graduated from the so-called technical high school and did successfully pass those exams; he then entered either St. Petersburg University or some other technical university in St. Petersburg. However, he did not graduate from there, having been thrown out for some reason, perhaps for taking part in a student strike. Yet, after a while he was accepted to the Riga Polytechnical Institute, successfully completed his education there, and became an engineer already at the end of the 19th century. At the time, there were very few engineers, and the training each got was in a way almost unique. Among father's books, I saw a volume called *Alma Mater*, containing

a full list of graduates; their biographies were also printed. My father was there too. Having become an engineer, father got a job with some company, at a factory or in a laboratory. Then he started his own 'business' — a plant for water purification. Removing salts from water is necessary in order to use it in steam boilers, and in some other cases. My father held a number of patents, some of them international. Photo 6 displays the first page of what at the time was known as a 'privilege'. He had several such 'privileges' and patents. What we would now call father's 'small business' consisted of a chemical laboratory which occupied a four-room apartment in the same building where we lived, plus a fairly large workshop located in Izmailovo Park. This workshop manufactured some sort of machine for purifying water. Unfortunately, the scale of this business was such that, after the revolution, the workshop was not eligible for nationalization. As a result, my father was able to revive his business during the New Economic Policy (NEP) period, to my greatest displeasure. However, this entrepreneurship ended in the 1930s together with the NEP, and father worked, as in the years of War Communism, as an engineer at VSNKh (Supreme Soviet of People's Economy — *Editor's note*) and at some other institutions. It appears that he was an outstanding expert since he held fairly high-level engineering positions. Consequently, we existed quite peacefully — father worked in a trust of some sort, while my aunt worked at Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga until the beginning of the Great Patriotic war in June 1941.



Photo 7. Photograph of L. E. Ginzburg for an ID pass to a Soviet institution. Taken (presumably) in the 1930s.



Photo 9. Photograph of Roza Veniaminovna Wildauer (aunt of Vitaly Ginzburg), taken for an ID pass to Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga, an organization under the RSFSR People's Commissariat of Education (NKP). The photo shows the seal of the RSFSR NKP. Taken (presumably) in the 1930s.



Photo 8. Photograph of Vitaly Ginzburg at the age of 10. Written carefully on the back in Vitaly's hand: "A keepsake for my dear Aunt Roza from her loving Musya. Moscow, 29/I—1927." ('Musya' was an endearing family name for Vitaly Ginzburg during his childhood. — *Editor's note.*) This is how V. L. Ginzburg looked when he started school.

In his field of expertise (water purification; I assume he only dealt with water used for industrial purposes, or to be specific, for steam boilers), my father was a recognized authority and continued to be a consultant or something of the sort with VSNKh or with other State institutions.

It would be inappropriate if I chose to present my detailed biography here.³ I will only mention that my parents sent me to school beginning with fourth grade because they apparently feared that the school would be pretty bad. The level of teaching indeed fell dramatically in most schools in the post-revolutionary 1920s compared to the average level which was maintained before the revolution in good gymnasias and technical high schools. Attending school was not compulsory at the time, so I only started school at the age of 11, in fourth grade at once. I enrolled in School No. 57, on Markhlevskogo St. (formerly Milyutin Lane). This was a former French gymnasium located next to a catholic church. The teachers had remained the same, and I believe teaching was no worse than before the revolution, except for the teaching of history, which was reduced to studying speeches by Comrade Stalin. Alas, at that very moment a new reorganization campaign hit the schools: eleven-year (or ten-year) secondary schools were abolished, leaving only primary schools. After seven years of schooling, one had to enter an FZU (a sort of professional school affiliated with a factory or plant). Having graduated from the FZU, and presumably

³ My fairly detailed autobiography written on the occasion of winning the Nobel Prize in Physics 2003 can be found in: Ginzburg V. L. *On Superconductivity and Superfluidity. Autobiography* (Moscow: Fizmatlit, 2006) (in Russian). A slightly extended text of this book was translated into English and published under the title *On Superconductivity and Superfluidity. A Scientific Autobiography* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2009).

after having worked for some time in industry, a pupil would earn the right to continue to a Rabfak (a university department reserved for ‘workers’), and then, if you wished, you could enter a higher educational institution.

In 1931, I graduated from seven-year school; I had no wish to enrol in an FZU, and anyway I had nonproletarian roots. I managed to get accepted to tuition by correspondence and in 1934 was allowed to transfer to the 2nd course at Moscow State University (MGU). I was a good student. However, I did not dare to major in theory, and chose optics. My diploma thesis was an experimental project. When I graduated, the Chair of Optics (headed by Academician G S Landsberg) offered me the position of postgraduate student starting in autumn 1938. However, conscription into the army could prevent this; in fact, I had already been drafted and sent home to await a draft notice telling me where and when to present myself with bags in hand. So, I had to wait for the draft notice, while the university was cutting through red tape. In those times, newly accepted postgraduate students of Moscow State University were usually given a deferment from army service. However, it was 1938, the war was looming, and there were plans to rescind deferments (which was done in 1939); eventually, we were lucky to get the deferment. It was especially unpleasant to live through this waiting spell in a dark room, running the vacuum pump that I used for my apparatus. So, I made an attempt to delve into theory, meaning to explain perhaps one possible effect in the optics of canal rays. I went to ask Professor I E Tamm, Head

of the Chair of Theoretical Physics, for advice. He gave me his full support and inspired me, and very soon I produced some results in quantum electrodynamics. Already in 1939, I wrote three papers which were seconded by well-known physics theorist Acad. V A Fock for publication in *Doklady Akademii Nauk SSSR* journal (now *Proc. Russ. Acad. Sci.*). I dropped optics and became a physics theorist.

I have rushed ahead of the story and forgotten to explain how I became a student. One of my aunt’s ‘clients’ (someone she helped to order foreign literature from abroad) was Evgeny Fedorovich Bakhmet’ev. He was a veteran Bolshevik and submariner who became expert in X-ray structural analysis after the revolution. He headed the X-ray laboratory at the Lepse Institute. He arranged for me to be accepted there as laboratory assistant. I wrote the story up in detail in my autobiography (see footnote 3) and will only remark here that in the course of my work at Bakhmet’ev’s laboratory, I became excited about physics and chose it as my future profession. Two years later I was nearly 17, and naturally decided to enter university. I decided to take exams for the Physics Department of MGU in 1933. To succeed, I needed to somehow learn subjects taught in the senior classes of secondary school. I did that, not without a teacher’s help, and took the exams for the Physics Department in 1933. My results were not brilliant, and I was not accepted as a full-time student, but I was allowed to take an extramural course. In 1934, I was allowed to continue as a full-time student; I thus caught up with my course. I was a good student and



Аспирант физического факультета МГУ комсомолец В. Л. Гинзбург взял на себя обязательство защитить к юбилею университета диссертацию на ученую степень кандидата физико-математических наук.

Photo 10. V L Ginzburg as an experimental physicist. A photo from the large-circulation newspaper of Moscow State University: “Komsomol member V L Ginzburg, postgraduate student at the Physics Department of Moscow State University, has pledged to submit and defend his CandSci thesis in physics and mathematics before the anniversary of the university.” (A copy of this newspaper clipping was sent to the *UFN* editorial office by Yu D Pletner on the occasion of Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg’s 93rd birthday. It was handed to V L Ginzburg precisely on his birthday, 4 October 2009. — *Editor’s note.*)

graduated from the Physics Department of Moscow State University in 1938. As for my work before the war, I have briefly outlined it above.

Before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic war on the borders of the USSR, we, the physicists of FIAN (Lebedev Physical Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences), carried on with our ‘peaceful’ work, as probably many others were doing, and somehow were not getting ready for war. However, the war did burst out on 22 June 1941. I remember well listening to Molotov’s speech on the radio at about noon, holding my two-year-old daughter in my arms; he informed us of Germany’s attack. I remember how Molotov, stammering, ended his speech with the words: “The enemy shall be routed, victory shall be ours.” My father was in bed in the same room where we were listening to the radio—he was curing or, better to say, reviving from a recent heart attack. He was 78 years old but was still fairly full of life; I do not remember now if he was still a consultant somewhere or had already retired. As for me, I was working as a doctoral candidate at FIAN, engrossed in the physics problem that was the subject of my DSc thesis, which I submitted and defended in 1942. Father was, of course, totally out of touch with what I was doing or with physics in general.

FIAN began to ‘restructure’, but the first thing that comes to mind is the announcement that a ‘people’s volunteer corps’ was to be created. Like most other colleagues, I signed up, as a matter of course. We spent a day in some school, were assigned to certain companies, and then were sent home on condition that we would turn up immediately when our call-up papers arrived. Nothing arrived though, as the authorities decided that FIAN, and a number of other institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences, was to be evacuated to Kazan. It so happened that the first air raid on Moscow by the Germans (I am not sure but it feels like a month after the start of the war) and aircraft warning found me outdoors near the metro station and I spent the night underground in the metro. Returning home on foot in the morning, I saw some destruction caused by the bombs. This, by the way, was all I saw of the actual war, since we very soon departed for Kazan. There were four of us in the family: my father, my aunt, my wife, and myself. My daughter and her grandmother had left earlier, to a different destination.

Many but not all academic institutions were evacuated to Kazan. FIAN was assigned part of the second floor of the Kazan University Physics Department. Higher echelons of the FIAN staff were accommodated in various places all over the city, such as in flats belonging to acquaintances and the like, while the relative youngsters were squeezed into the university hostel rooms at the Klykovka. This was a school-type building on the outskirts of Kazan. At first, my and E L Feinberg’s families were put into one relatively large room divided in two by simply hanging a bedsheet or a blanket across. By the way, my friendship with Evgenii L’vovich Feinberg and his wife Valya dates back to that time, although we had been formally acquainted for some time before we had to share this room.

Then our families received a room each, perhaps about 25 sq. m in size. We were unlucky as we got the corner room: very cold in winter. Sometimes it was so cold that water would freeze indoors. For furniture, we naturally had four beds along the walls and a table in the middle. Life was more on the hungry side, of course, but at least I had a job, and so did my wife. But I guess that for my father and aunt the experience was especially bitter. Sadly, I do not remember all the details

but my aunt soon broke her leg (she was able to walk again after some time), and my father suddenly became an old man. It pains me to remember this time and I reproach myself for not having paid more attention to him. In fact, I could hardly have done more. In addition to heart problems, he developed the first symptoms of Alzheimer’s: he started losing his memory. Actually, he was not diagnosed with Alzheimer’s back in Kazan, but I think that was most probably what he had. Perhaps this illness ran in my father’s family: years later, father’s younger sister and then her son, my cousin, also suffered from it.

I am lucky this inherited trait has not affected me (or rather, to be precise, has not affected me — *yet*). I am writing these lines in July 2009, having reached the age of 92 and a half. My memory has, of course, deteriorated (I am especially prone to forgetting names and patronymics). On the whole though, whingeing about this ‘parameter’ would be sinful, but complaining about other ills, quite excusable: I now suffer from a blood disease (Waldenström’s disease). I have probably had it for a long time but at the beginning I only felt it as pain in the legs. Consequently, I was able to travel to Stockholm in 2003, and for some time was able to walk, but at the beginning of 2005 I had to go to hospital as I had complications and could not walk any more. I have been in and out of hospital for over four years now. I can barely move around the house using a walker and can sit in a wheelchair for several hours a day. I am still the Editor-in-Chief of *Uspekhi Fizicheskikh Nauk* (*Physics–Uspekhi*) journal and still write a little. I now write mostly about religion, trying to fight the clericalization of our country. Unfortunately, I work and read very slowly these days, and my pile of unread books and journals is growing every day. To be honest, my life is still



Photo 11. Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg and Nina Ivanovna Ginzburg, 2006. The photo was taken at the Research Center for Hematology of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, where V L Ginzburg received treatment for eighteen months (from February 2005 to August 2006).



Photo 12. V L Ginzburg's daughter — Irina Vital'evna Dorman and her husband — Professor Lev Isaakovich Dorman (V L Ginzburg's son-in-law).

incomparably better than the life that my father and aunt led in Kazan. The main factor, of course, is that my second wife Nina, to whom I have been very happily married since 1946, takes good care of me, even though she is 87 herself (true, we also have a nurse attending to me).

It's high time I stopped writing about myself, but I wish to mention that I have a daughter by my first marriage (she is 70 now), two granddaughters, and a great-grandson and a great-granddaughter; they were born in 2000. Alas, none of them live in Moscow, but they warm my heart even at a distance.

My father wrote in one of his surviving letters or simply in his notes (see photo 5) that my daughter was born in 1939 and the name we chose for her was Irina. Father was really baffled as to why the girl was not given the name Avgusta or simply Gusta. I remember our debates on what name to choose for her, and how the name Gusta was rejected as it seemed too rare (!?). Now I understand that failing to name



Photo 13. V L Ginzburg's granddaughters: Maria Dorman (left) and Viktoria Dorman. The photograph was taken in 1974.

my daughter after my late mother had been a terrible thing to do, and this blunder made 70 years ago causes me much sorrow.

The surname of my daughter and my granddaughters is Dorman — my son-in-law's name — and the surname of my great-grandchildren is Petrov. Consequently, my personal



Photo 14. V L Ginzburg's granddaughter Viktoria Dorman with her husband Mikhail Petrov and their children (V L Ginzburg's great-grandchildren), the twins Grigory and Elizaveta Petrov, born on 27 February 2000. The photograph was taken in 2005.

branch on the Ginzburgs genealogical tree, in fact, terminates with me. However, it is no doubt a very big tree, little affected by my having no descendants bearing the surname Ginzburg.

By the way, these days I really wonder why it is that I know so little about my ancestors. There are two reasons for this. First, I was not really interested in this stuff and never asked my father about it. Second, it is a fact of life that I was 53 years younger than my father and therefore had never seen his parents – it had all been too long ago. As a result, my descendants also know very little about our family. They may regret it some day, so I am placing a number of photographs in this article to give them a least an idea of what we all looked like.

Let me point out that Ginzburg is a very widespread surname. I B Ginzburg wrote in his book *Trace on the Earth*⁴ that in St. Petersburg alone there were more than 400 Ginzburgs. Moscow wouldn't be far behind, I guess. It would be absurd, of course, to regard all of them as relatives; these are namesakes of various ancestry. The surname Ginzburg seems to have originated from the name of a small town Günzburg in Germany (in Bavaria). This, however, produced a whole 'family' of similar surnames: Ginzburg, Ginsberg, Ginzberg, Günzburg, etc. I use the spelling Ginzburg. I can say very little even about that

⁴ Ginzburg I B *Trace on the Earth* (in Russian). (St. Petersburg: Polytechnical University Publ., 2007). Circulation 250 copies. (!). A very impressive photograph placed on the front cover of this brochure was taken of the work of art by Vadim (Dima) Abramovich Sidur (1924–1986). I will remark at this point that V A Sidur and myself were friends.

modest branch of the genealogical tree of the Ginzburgs, which is in some way related to me.

My father had two sisters. One of them was killed during a pogrom in the south of Russia.⁵ She left two sons. Father tried very hard to help the boys, but without much success. The younger one happened to be an absolute good-for-nothing. The elder son Khaim (my cousin) used to visit us sometimes around 1924 and I remember how he took me to an international chess tournament. Khaim was probably a good chess player (and seemed to be well known in the chess community). At any rate, he once took me to one of the multiboard chess contests when an international chess tournament of high rank was conducted in Moscow in 1925 at the Metropol restaurant, and even had my little book autographed by Lasker, Capablanca, and Bogoliubov (who eventually won that tournament).

I did play chess, of course, but very badly. I never grew very fond on it, have no innate ability, and did not care to learn, even though it is possible to play chess decently if one devotes enough time to it, memorizes chess problems, and so forth.

⁵ Written on the back of photo 18 in Lazar Efimovich's hand is a note on the fate of his sister Khasya-Liba: "Khasya-Liba was killed on the 1st day of Seder 19?? in Novograd-Volynskii." (Question marks were inserted by Lazar Efimovich, as he was probably unable to remember exactly at the time of writing in which year his sister Khasya-Liba had been killed. Novograd-Volynskii—a town in the Zhitomir region, now Ukraine. (Editor's note.)



Photo 15. Photo of Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg and his sister Elizaveta Efimovna Ginzburg on his right (her husband's surname was also Ginzburg), and on his left (presumably) the other sister of L E Ginzburg — Khasya-Liba. The photo was found in the archives of V L Ginzburg's great-nephew — Aleksandr Samuilovich Ginzburg. The date on the back of the photograph reads '5 October 1914'. This could simply be a family holiday (and thus a good reason for taking a formal photograph as a memento): in 1914, 5 October coincided with 15 Tishrei on the Jewish calendar — that is, with the first day of Sukkot holiday.

Unfortunately, I know nothing about the further fate of these two cousins of mine. The other sister of my father (Aunt Liza) married a namesake, so that the ‘Ginzburg tree’ has not terminated with her. As far as I remember, she lived in Moscow and had three daughters and a son.

Among these daughters, I knew one, Bella, who tried to teach me English. She was murdered; to hide the crime trail, her body was dismembered and thrown out and scattered over a large area. The suspicion fell on her husband, Professor Mirkin. He was tried and found guilty, but later the verdict was overruled and he taught at the Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys. Aunt Liza’s son was six years older than me and worked as an electrical engineer. And finally, his son, my great-nephew, is alive and healthy: he holds a DSc degree in physics and mathematics and works at the Obukhov Institute of Atmospheric Physics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). By the way, his name is Aleksandr Samuilovich Ginzburg, and he is the only relative with whom I am in contact. The two of us are the only Ginzburgs in the directory of RAS personnel. Two out of 3500–4000 of the entire personnel. Well, Ginzburgs are numerous but not that numerous. I have already mentioned that at the moment I know nothing about my relatives on my mother’s side.⁶

⁶ In the sorrowful list of victims of the Holocaust (http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/IY_HON_Entrance), there are seven people who bore the name Wildauer and were killed in the Riga Ghetto. (Editor’s note.)

Returning to I B Ginzburg’s book: he mentions a large number of more or less well-known Ginzburgs.

It would be pertinent to return here to the ancestry of the surname Ginzburg. It is traced to the town Günzburg in Germany. The town existed even before Christ. The earliest documents that mention this town on the Danube river date back to the year 1055. In 1301, Günzburg became the administrative center of some region in Swabia (Bavaria). A Judaic community has existed in Günzburg at least since 1566. These and other data concerning Günzburg can be found in the book devoted to Ginzburgs (see footnote 4).

I know very little about my forbears because—very unfortunately—I felt quite indifferent to it; even my father’s mother, with whom father was especially close, died in 1904, i.e., 12 years before I was born. The only thing worth mentioning is perhaps the fact (or very likely the fact) that my ‘true’ family name is not Ginzburg, but Landau. Father told me once that either his grandfather or his great-grandfather went under the surname of Landau, but having moved to Russia (from Poland?), he married a young lady with the surname Ginzburg and changed his surname to Ginzburg for some property-connected reasons. In fact I do know that father had a cousin whose surname was Landau and that they all formed a closely knit group. I once told this story to someone, I don’t remember who, and it later got back to me that Landau (Lev Davidovich) was so fond of Ginzburg (i.e., of me) because we were related. This stopped me from ever repeating this yarn.



Photo 16. Sanel' Simonovich Ginsburg (Aleksandr Semenovich Ginzburg) was the husband of Aunt Liza (sister of Lazar Efimovich, the father of V L Ginzburg and the grandfather of Aleksandr Samuilovich Ginzburg (the very much alive great-nephew of V L Ginzburg). The photograph was taken on 28 December 1896.

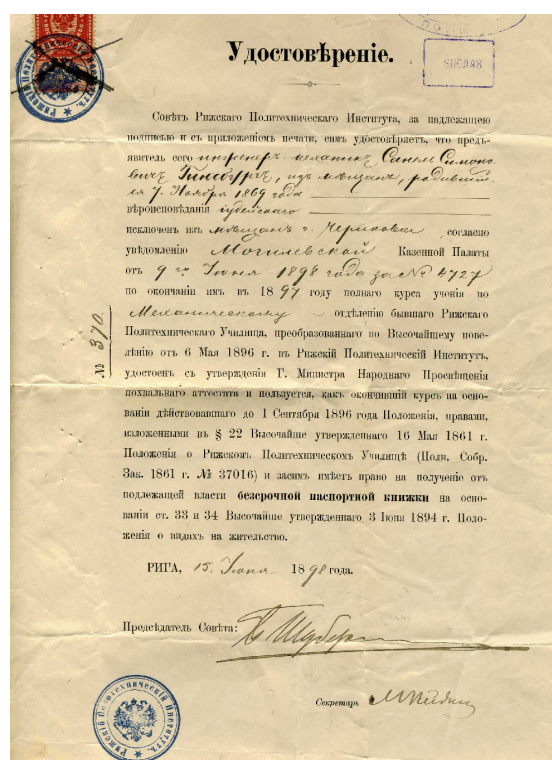


Photo 17. Document certifying that “... the holder of this certificate, mechanical engineer Sanel’ Simonovich Ginsburg, was taken of the list of commoners of the town of Chernigov ... on his graduation in 1894 from the complete course of education of the Mechanics Division of the Riga Polytechnical Institute... and is therefore entitled to have a **termless passport** issued to him by the relevant authorities...” In other words, the right to get a passport and become a ‘free citizen’ was only achievable by a Jew living in the Residence Pale by completing a university-level education (!)



Photo 18. V L Ginzburg's grandmother and grandfather — the parents of his father (sitting). Standing left to right: aunt Liza — his father's younger sister, V L Ginzburg's father — Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg, and Khasya-Liba (VL's father's sister). Written on the back of the photo in Lazar Efimovich's hand: "Photographed in Moscow sometime around 1889. The father (i.e., Efim Ginzburg — V L Ginzburg's grandfather) died in Odessa in 1893, 24/XII. The mother (mother of Lazar Efimovich) died in Priluki in 1904, 15/IV. Khasya-Liba was killed on the 1st of Seider 19?? in Novograd-Volynsk." (Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg has not indicated the exact year when his sister Khasya-Liba was murdered. — *Editor's note.*)

Photo 18, taken around 1889, portrays the entire family: grandfather, grandmother, and their children: my father and two his sisters. My grandfather (on my father's side) died in 1893, and my grandmother in 1904, 12 years before I was born. It is no surprise that I know practically nothing about her except that she was especially close to my father, her only son, and a successful son at that. Figure 19 shows an 1898 photograph of my grandmother with my father. Father was already a mechanical engineer 'standing on his own two feet', so to speak. For some reason, I think that this photograph was taken to please my grandmother.

My father was religious: sometimes he would pray and attend synagogue. Several times he took me with him. However, when I grew up and began demanding insistently that father explain to me why and to whom he was praying, his answer was: "I pray to remember my childhood and my parents, and to forget the bad things that I now have in my life."

Photo 20 portrays my parents, who married in 1914.

Photo 21 shows Aunt Roza, and photographs 22 and 23 are of myself, at the age of two years and nine months (photo taken on 21 July 1919) and eight years, respectively.

It is curious, I think, that Jews still hold on to some remnants of the tribal system. Thus, the 'rank' (I don't know the right word) of 'Cogan' or 'Cohen' is still passed on



Photo 19. Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg with his mother. The photograph was taken in 1898 immediately after Lazar Efimovich had received his engineer's diploma.



Photo 20. Avgusta Veniaminovna Wildauer-Ginzburg and Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg. According to the note written on the back of this photo in L E Ginzburg's handwriting, the photograph was taken on the day of a Purim holiday of 1915 (28 February 1915).

through the eldest son and signifies belonging to the priesthood of the Judaic temple (hence, I guess, the surnames Kogan, Kagan, etc.).

I will return to sad things. Until the beginning of the 1930s father was still a sturdy, strong man, of medium height. This, or almost like this, is how I remember him at the beginning of the evacuation to Kazan. But he soon started to lose strength. His illness was progressing. Obviously, there was nothing I could do to change things radically, but I still hate myself for having done nothing to help him.

As far as I remember, we had to put father in a hospital in June or July 1942, and he died there on 20 July 1942 at the age of about 79. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Kazan. And I do not know exactly where his grave is. In 1942, we did all we could: the grave was in some way separated from the surroundings by a low cement fence. However, when I went to Kazan several years later, I could not find or, more precisely, identify that grave.

I do not also know where the remains of my mother lie. She was buried in the Dorogomilovskoe (if I remember correctly) Jewish Cemetery in Moscow, and my father erected a marble tombstone there (see Photo 24). However, this cemetery was cleared out and closed a few years before the Great Patriotic war, and people were allowed to transfer their relatives' remains to other cemeteries outside Moscow (Vostryakovskoe, if I am not mistaken). Father



Photo 21. Aunt Roza. Written on the back of the photograph in V L Ginzburg's hand are the dates of birth and death of Roza Veniaminovna Wildauer: 7/III 1891 — 1/IV 1948.



Photo 22. Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg at the age of 2 years, 9 months, and 17 days. Photo taken on the same day as photo 4, i.e., 21 July 1919.



Photo 23. Vitaly Ginzburg at seven and a half years of age. Written on the back of the photograph in Lazar Efimovich's (father of V L Ginzburg) hand is the date 27/III — 1924.



Photo 24. Photograph of the tombstone that Lazar Efimovich Ginzburg had erected on the grave of Avgusta Veniaminovna at the Dorogomilovskoe (?) Jewish cemetery in Moscow. The photograph was large in size and on its back L E Ginzburg described, for the sake of his son Vitaly, the circumstances of his mother's death (shown in photo 5).

relocated my mother's remains and her tombstone to the new spot, but the war interrupted the re-erection of the tombstone at the grave. Apparently, this was very difficult at the time. I remember how father and I went to the new cemetery and saw mother's marble tombstone lying on the ground but not yet erected. I think that the marble was stolen during the war but this does not remove my blame for not seeking the tombstone when I returned to Moscow from evacuation. Finding it would have been highly unlikely—it had not been erected; nevertheless, this is no excuse.

After I divorced my first wife in 1946, Aunt Roza stayed in our old flat alone, in the room where she had lived. As for the rest, her life was turning from bad to worse: pains in the leg, and she was lonely now because I had rented a room and tried to spend as much time as possible in Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod) where I had my second job and where, more importantly, my second wife lived in exile (I have described that story in detail elsewhere, in my autobiography and in a number of articles). At some point, she started having anxiety and mental problems, and eventually committed suicide (1 April 1948). She was cremated and the urn with her ashes rests in the necropolis No. 18 in the Moscow Crematorium (Donskoe cemetery). This is the entire 'material' memorabilia I have of my relatives. I am bitterly disappointed that I failed to do as much as I should to make my father's and aunt's lives better in the few years before their deaths.

While writing these notes, I was remembering all my life and was somehow summing it up. I concluded that, on the whole, had been very lucky, despite, of course, certain misfortunes (my mother's death, some other less tragic events). Anyway, in my childhood, I had a caring father and aunt, I did not suffer from hunger, and survived the

war. All my life I did what I loved (physics and astrophysics), and did it rather well; I became a more or less well-known scientist. It all culminated in my winning the Nobel Prize in Physics 2003. I have no delusion of grandeur and know the true value of any prize or award. All the same, it was wonderful to receive the Nobel Prize, even in the autumn of my life (see photo 25).

This is one side of my life. Another aspect is that having lived such a long life, including the hardest times under Stalin's rule, I, on the one hand, was not crushed by serious repressions and, on the other hand, have not troubled my conscience with denunciations against innocent people or by signing vile declarations, for example, against A D Sakharov. Quite the opposite, I helped him, and have written about it, for example, in the article "On the Sakharov phenomenon."⁷ Now, as before, I try to do my best to defend persecuted scientists⁸ and oppose the onslaught of 'fake sciences' and the clericalization of our country.⁹

I will add that I have been very lucky with my second wife; we have been together since 1946. I am on very good terms with my daughter and my granddaughters.

Ill as I am, and at my very advanced age, I naturally think about death. Such thoughts come especially often to older people, and in fact people of any age when they approach their deathbed. The same is true of people at any stage in life if they think seriously about the meaning of life (Lev Tolstoy wrote a lot on this topic). This is not difficult

⁷ Ginzburg V L *On Physics and Astrophysics* (collected articles) (Moscow: Byuro Kvantum, 1995) [Translated into English: *The Physics of a Lifetime* (Berlin: Springer, 2001)].

⁸ See, e.g., the journal *Zdravyyi Smysl* (Common Sense) No. 2, p. 10 (2009).

⁹ Ginzburg V L *About Atheism, Religion, and Secular Humanism* (Moscow: FIAN, 2009). Also *Novaya Gazeta* weekly newspaper of 12 August 2009.



Photo 25. Nina Ivanovna Ginzburg and Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg in Stockholm in December 2003 on the occasion of V L Ginzburg being awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics 2003. The photo was taken in front of the Grand Hotel, where Nobel Prize winners, their relatives, and invited guests traditionally stay.



Photo 26. Vitaly Ginzburg and Nina Ginzburg (b. Ermakova) in 1948.

to understand: it is not easy to comprehend and accept the fact that life is finite and death is inevitable. That is why people at the dawn of time invented myths about life after death. Religious people believe this tale even today. Well, let me tell you that I have no such fear. I'll say more: ever since the beginning of my illness (that is, since the beginning of 2005) I have yearned to die and even asked doctors to help me but, as far as I remember, all of them disapproved of my opinion. Alas, this is the doctor's burden. I am convinced that a human being has not only the right to live—it seems to me this is even written into our Constitution—but also the right to a painless death. One can say that euthanasia¹⁰ is the mildest form of implementing this right. We know, nevertheless, that euthanasia, a seemingly wise and certainly humane right, is rejected in most countries and apparently by most religions. Of course, the implementation of the right to a painless death, or, one can say, suicide on demand, is dangerous in view of possible abuse. On the whole, this is not the right time to raise this issue in today's Russia, so I shall not go into it any further.

But I will repeat that, being an atheist, I regard death as a perfectly natural event; the only thing that can restrain a person from using the right to end one's own life is care for his or her relatives and near ones. To avoid misunderstanding, I wish to emphasize that I am not afraid of death but really fear the pain and all other things that often come with it. However, the fear of this pain is another argument in favor of implementing the right to a painless death.

¹⁰ Euthanasia is assisting the death of people who are gravely and terminally ill, on their own or their relatives' request, of course.



Photo 27. 60 years later. Vitaly Lazarevich's 92nd birthday—Nina Ivanovna Ginzburg and Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg at home on 4 October 2008. 62 years of happiness. 62 years together.

I'll sum up with a quote from Nikolay Gumilev, who wrote of the 'incomparable right' of a person 'to choose when and how to die'.

I do not know how my life will unfold: I can only hope that it won't get any worse and I will be able, even with great difficulty, to keep up the fight against phenomena that I regard as negative, in our society and in particular in the life of what is very close to my heart—the Russian Academy of Sciences.

17 August 2009