

# Maria Baicher

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Moscow

Russia

Interviewer: Svetlana Bogdanova

Date of interview: July 2003

*Maria Baicher is a nice blue-eyed, vivid and ready to smile, plainly but tastefully dressed lady.*

*Since her husband Yuzef Kirtzer's death in 1998, she has lived alone in a three-bedroom apartment in the center of Moscow near the governmental office. It's a spacious and cozy apartment.*

*There is a big library and the walls are decorated with pictures and sculptures that her husband, who was an artist, and his friends made.*

*There are a few antique pieces of furniture that her grandmother left her and there is also furniture of the 1970s in the apartment.*

*She moved into this apartment in 1978 and since then, the apartment hasn't been renovated. Maria is thinking of renovations, but she is horrified at the amount of money needed.*

*She is quite well-off as she also has another apartment that she leases. It enables her to travel abroad, go to the cinema or first nights at theaters. On weekends she visits her son's family and helps them to look after their children.*

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- **Family background**

My paternal great-grandfather, Aaron Baicher, was born in 1799. He was a cantonist [1](#). Being an orphan, at the age of 13, he was taken to the tsarist army. He served for 25 years, and then obtained a permit to reside in Moscow. I don't know where he came from. I think that after his service was over he received a starting capital.

My great-grandfather took to business and was quite fortunate. He became a wood and construction materials dealer. He owned several wood storage facilities and a big house nearby. He was doing so well that during the Russian-Turkish War [2](#), my great-grandfather provided horses to



the tsarist army.

He got married early. According to the family legend, my great-grandfather had over 40 children. He was married twice. In his first marriage, he had 17 children. This marriage ended tragically. Near Moscow, bandits attacked the family and killed my great-grandfather's wife and 15 children.

Only two children survived. He remarried my great-grandmother Hana, who I think was born in 1842. In this marriage, my great-grandfather had 26 children, and there were two children from his first marriage. People called them 'the Baichers that were almost slaughtered.' I saw one girl whom I met once at my grandmother's house in the 1930s.

Her surname, after her husband, was Poplavskaya. Unfortunately, I don't remember her first name. The family lived in a big house and the sons were growing up and lived to enjoy life. They used to take girls to restaurants. However, they only ate kosher food.

My great-grandfather and his family were religious Jews. He didn't give his children a higher education. He involved his sons in his business and they followed into his footsteps. He died in 1905 at the age of 106. After having a row with his wife he went to sleep in a summer hut where he caught a cold and died. He was buried in the Jewish section of Dragomilovskoye cemetery.

I saw my great-grandmother Hana only once in my life, in early 1941. She lived in the family of my great-grandfather's daughter from the first marriage - Poplavskaya. I remember her very well. She was 99. She was thin, gray-haired and rather tiny. She was already bedridden and passed away two months later, and was buried beside my great-grandfather's grave.

Unfortunately, I don't know the names of all of Aaron Baicher's children. Many of them died young, and many others were scattered around the world. The political situation in the country in the years following the [Russian] Revolution of 1917 [3](#) dictated people to cut off their relationships to avoid doing any harm to their relatives [see [Keep in touch with relatives abroad](#)] [4](#).

My grandfather Yuli, whose Jewish name was Yudel, was born in 1874. His brother Daniel Baicher [1883-1938] had a daughter and a son. Aaron's third child was Lev Baicher. I never saw him in my grandmother's house, but when he died in 1961 his daughters invited all Baicher relatives to the funeral. Lev had two daughters, Lubov Zamyslova and Tatiana Yureneva, and a son named Esai Baicher. They had children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They live in Moscow. I also remember Aunt Pasha Baicher. She didn't have a family of her own and often visited us at home. She was lonely and kind, and loved my father.

Then came Arisha Baicher, Alexandra Baicher and Mendel Baicher. Mendel Baicher's older son Yuli perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War [5](#). Lisa Baicher - her descendants live in Moscow. Rina Baicher who was called Risha in the family, had no family of her own. I didn't know Grigori Baicher, but I knew his son Aaron very well.

He was born in 1920. Him, his wife Tatiana and their grandchildren Lyova and Ania moved to America in 1990. I also knew Aunt Minush - which was her Jewish name. Her other name was Mina Baicher. Her last name was Maltsena after her husband.

She had a son named Aaron who perished during the Great Patriotic War and a daughter, Ania Artamonova. I went to Aunt Minush's funeral in 1978. She was 88 and the youngest. She was

buried in the Vostriakovskoye town cemetery, in the Jewish section, and no rituals were observed.

All members of the Baicher family who died before 1944, including my great-grandfather and grandfather, were buried in the Jewish section of Dragomilovskoye cemetery. There was a big and beautiful gravestone on my grandfather's grave. In the 1940s, during the construction of Kutuzovskiy Prospekt, which became one of the central thoroughfares in Moscow, Dragomilovskoye cemetery was in the way and it was liquidated. We managed to move the grave and gravestone to the Jewish section of Vostriakovskoye cemetery where members of the Baicher family were buried afterward.

My grandfather, Yuli Baicher, was my great-grandfather's son from his second marriage. He was a big man of pleasant appearance, very kind and tolerant. My grandmother and grandfather met in the house of my great-grandfather's daughter from his first marriage, Poplavskaya. My grandfather was visiting them and my grandmother came from Smolensk [370 km from Moscow] to visit her acquaintances, and that's when they met. Then it was time for my grandmother to go back home to Smolensk. My grandfather went to take her to the railway station, but he went with her as far as Smolensk and in 1901 they got married. Their wedding took place at Krasnoye station. It is believed that their wedding was halfway between Moscow and Smolensk. I still have an invitation to the wedding.

My grandmother's father had passed away and so her mother signed the card. Grandfather also had his mother sign the invitation. They had a Jewish wedding with a rabbi and a chuppah. My grandmother's name was Ida and her Jewish name was Edlia, nee Fliamenbaum.

After she married grandfather she adopted his last name of Baicher. I don't know anything about her father. All I know from her documents is that her patronymic was Tanchunovna Chunovna. I don't know her maiden name. My great-grandmother's name was Reveka Fliamenbaum.

My grandmother was strict with the children. Since my father was not an obedient boy, he was often punished and the only person who forgave and sympathized with him was my grandfather.

My grandfather was a wood dealer like his father. He was very successful and provided well for his family. He had a wood storage in the center of Moscow. His family rented an apartment nearby. He was shot with a point-black firing rifle in his home in 1922. Some men wearing sailor uniforms came to his home and demanded money.

There was no money and they killed him before his younger son, my father's eyes. I knew a woman whose mother and my aunt were friends in their youth. She told me, 'I've heard this story about how they killed your grandfather.' His younger son, my father, was traumatized. He screamed and couldn't calm down for a long time since it all happened before his eyes.

My grandmother remarried. She married Nathan Tisee, a Jewish man, and moved into his apartment. Her second husband perished in NKVD [6](#) imprisonment. My grandmother lived in his apartment. She was a beautiful woman who liked life and was a good housewife. She liked having guests and was very religious. She went to the synagogue regularly and had a seat of her own there. She observed all Jewish holidays and fasted. My parents and I visited her.

I particularly remember Pesach. All relatives and their children got together in her home. There was traditional food on the table. There were no fridges, but they had a shed in the yard where they

stored ice. She kept jellied meat and all other dishes that she cooked for holidays according to all rules, knejdlakh for broth and matzah. She made matzah for the holiday herself. She also bought matzah at the synagogue and ground it to have flour for her bakeries. She had special crockery for the holidays and it wasn't supposed to be used on other days.

My grandmother observed Sabbath. She didn't teach me the traditions. My mother was Russian, but my grandmother raised me to love Jewish holidays and delicious food, though she didn't really realize that I would remember and cherish this way of life. I liked it that my grandmother could sew well. She chose styles, embroidered and knitted, and I learned to do that too.

I went for walks along Moscow boulevards with her and to the cinema and when I became a student she liked to take me to the theater. My grandmother and mother often went to the Mikhoels [7](#) Theater.

My grandmother had housemaids before the war. She didn't receive a pension since she had never worked. Her older son supported her as he was the wealthiest of her children. My grandmother hated the Soviet power and Stalin. Her first husband was killed in 1922 and her second husband was arrested in 1937 [during the so-called Great Terror] [8](#) and perished.

My grandmother openly expressed her opinions to me. I was just a child and when I returned home from her place, I told my parents what I had heard from her. My parents grew pale and talked to my grandmother seriously asking her to not discuss such subjects with me.

My grandmother Ida and grandfather Yuli had three children. Their older son Michael was born in 1902. Their second child was a girl. She was born in 1903. Her name is Frieda, and her Jewish name Freida. She shall turn 100 this year. My father was the youngest. He was born in 1906.

Michael Baicher was a very smart and determined man. He completed grammar school. Being a Jew, he had to win a competition to be admitted. He had to write a three-page dictation without a single mistake and he did it. He fit in the [five percent] quota [9](#) for Jewish students in Russian grammar schools. Later Uncle Michael entered a Mining College. Since he didn't come from a proletarian family [he was considered to belong to the deprives] [10](#), he was periodically expelled from the Academy, but then he was readmitted again.

My aunt told me that Grandmother asked him, 'Michael, how come they expel and then readmit you again?' and he replied, 'Mama, don't you understand? Those Komsomol [11](#) members stand up for me. Who would they seek help from in class?'

My uncle was chief engineer of Electropech' trust. He worked a lot. He constructed metallurgical plants in Russia and abroad. He was a laureate of the Lenin Award [12](#) and was a talented and bright person. Uncle Michael had no children. He died in 1974. He was buried in the Jewish section of Vostriakovskoye cemetery.

Aunt Frieda Baicher - Goldina in marriage - also studied in grammar school. Since grandmother and the director of the grammar school were friends, she was admitted without exams. She failed to finish grammar school due to the revolution that took place in 1917. My aunt was inclined to humanitarian subjects and she painted well. She took painting classes, but the revolution ruined it all. For some time she worked in the All- Union Society of Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries. She was responsible for organizational work.

My aunt knew French. She studied it in grammar school. She also had a good taste. Later she went to work as deputy manager of the fish industry pavilion at the agricultural exhibition. She managed its decoration. She invited the best designers to work there and the pavilion had a great design. I once visited there and remember that they gave me a huge artificial fish.

My aunt's husband, Matvey Goldin, was an engineer in the aviation industry. They had a son named Yuli Goldin, who was born in 1941. He is a wonderful person. He became a doctor and in 1978, he emigrated to the US with his family. He is very successful there.

My father, Arkadi Baicher, whose Jewish name is Aaron, went to work as a stoker at the railroad to support his family after his father died tragically. He became assistant locomotive operator and then an operator. He was the only breadwinner in the family. His brother studied in college and his sister and mother didn't work. He was a hardworking man. He felt responsible for the family and was its support.

When he came of age, he always made all the difficult decisions for the family. He was a vivid and naughty boy and grandmother often punished him. He was a very strong man. I remember that he carried a wardrobe alone when we were moving once. My father joined the Komsomol when working at the railroad. He never joined the Party.

Many years later, when my father was married and had a family of his own, he finished evening classes of the Railroad College with my mother's blessing and support.

My mother was Russian. My maternal grandfather Matvey Dolgov came from a Christian family of Old Believers [13](#). He was born in 1858 in Klinty, Bryansk region [475 km from Moscow]. I tracked down eleven generations in Old Believers' church books and found that the first Old Believer arrived in Bryansk region.

He was born in 1684. My great-grandfather and great-grandmother had 20 children. My grandfather was the youngest. He served 20 years in the tsarist army. He took part in the liberation of Bulgaria from the Tatar yoke, and was wounded near Plevna town and released from the army. After the army, my grandfather started business in Moscow. He bought cattle, supplied it to slaughterhouses, and sold meat. My grandfather's marriage with my grandmother Anna Boni was prearranged by matchmakers. Regretfully, he died of tuberculosis in 1905. He was buried in Dragomilovskoye cemetery in Moscow.

My grandmother's father, Antoine Boni, was French. He escaped to Russia during the French Revolution with his son from his first marriage, and he had his savings. He never learned Russian. My grandmother's mother came from the Russian family Prokhorov. It was a renowned family of merchants. They owned textile factories.

After Antoine got married, he built a factory manufacturing albumin for fabric painting. It was a small factory, but it supplied its product to all textile factories in Moscow. There were five children in the family: two sons and three daughters. My grandmother was the youngest. They had different lives.

Maria Boni, one of the sisters, lost her son during World War I. Another sister, Elizaveta Boni, married a German man and must have left the country before World War I. The family lost track of her. The son, Vladimir Boni, inherited the factory. He died in 1916. His children were small when

the revolution took place in 1917. The state expropriated the factory, and the children had to hide away. There is no information about what happened to them. Sophia Boni, another sister of my grandmother, had a big family. It seems there were about 14 children. From what I know, Sophia's husband, and all daughters-in-law and sons-in-law were Russian. We became friends with this family.

My grandmother was born in 1868. She completed grammar school. When she got married, she became a housewife in a big family. My grandmother was Christian, but she rarely went to church. She died in 1935 and was buried in Dragomilovskoye cemetery. My grandmother and grandfather had six children.

My mother's older sister, Evgenia Zotova, was born in 1894. Her Russian husband, Alexei Zotov, had a higher military education. He served in the tsarist army and after the revolution he joined the Red Army. They had a son named Michael Zotov. Aunt Evgenia died in 1974.

My mother's brother Nikolay, born in 1904, died of typhoid in the 1920s. There was another son named Dmitri. I remember my uncle Dmitri very well. He graduated from Plekhanov College in Moscow and was a good specialist in chemical treatment of water. He took part in the Great Patriotic War, returned home and died of cancer in 1957.

My grandparents' younger son Vladimir, born in 1906, had an unpleasant character. He drank a lot and had affairs. He left and the family had no information about what happened to him afterward. In 1896 my grandmother's son Sergei was born, but he died in infancy.

My mother was very talented and she performed in the school theatrical club. She completed grammar school in 1916 and received a gold medal [highest award given to graduates of secondary educational institutions in Russia and the USSR]. After the revolution of 1917, my mother entered Moscow State University. However, she didn't study there for long. She had to support her family and it became too difficult for her to combine work and studies. My mother graduated from a theatrical studio and worked as an actress in this studio. Soon this studio merged with the Meyerhold [14](#) studio. There were different schools of acting. Her former teacher was 'tsar and God' for her, but she didn't understand Meyerhold's teaching. She had an argument with the producer of this studio and left the stage.

She went to work at the Ogonyok editorial office. She was the secretary of its chief editor, Koltsov [15](#). My mother worked there for a few years and was a good employee. She specialized in photo reviews. Being a smart and enterprising person, she established a bureau selling extra photographs to other editorial offices.

Then she went to work at the photo office of TASS [Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union] where she worked for the rest of her life. The fact that my mother met such people as V. Meyerhold and M. Koltsov, whom authorities accused of treason and executed, and also her work in TASS, taught her to be very cautious and avoid discussions of political subjects at home or with her friends. She knew about the arrests in the country and tried to protect her dear ones. She wasn't a member of the Communist Party.

My mother lived in a civil marriage before she met my father, but it fell apart. In 1930, she went to a recreation center on vacation. She wasn't in one of her best moods. She was sitting alone reading



a book. My father was coming to this recreation center from the railway station. He was a young, handsome and big man. And so they met.

My father kept visiting her after their vacation in the recreation center. My mother had other admirers. However, my father became number one and they got married. My mother was eight years older than my father, but she didn't look it. She was slim and interesting and always dressed well.

My parents' families had no objections against this marriage. My father was a naughty member of the family and my grandmother was glad that he had settled down. My mother's relatives rejected any national prejudices or religious narrow-mindedness. My parents had a small wedding party. My father lived in a room in a communal apartment [16](#). My mother also lived with her mother in a room in a communal apartment.

### • Growing up

When my parents got married they exchanged their two rooms for one bigger room in a former elderly people's home that the tsarist government built for merchants' widows. It was a five-storied house. It was a big room with a lot of light and high ceiling where they lived. They had a sink in their room. There was no bathroom in the apartment - families went to a public bathroom to wash. There were two toilets with four cabins on each floor. There was an elevator at the front door entrance.

On the ground floor there was a public Laundromat which was very convenient. On the first floor there was a common kitchen. There were stoves in the kitchen. Housewives prepared everything for cooking in their rooms and then did the cooking in the kitchen. Stoves were stoked with fuel oil all day long. In the evening, a boiler was turned on and tenants stood in lines for boiling water. There was a dry steam drier and washbasins for washing and rinsing. There was also another drier in the attic. I was born in this house in 1932 and grew up there.

When my mother was expecting a baby, she told my father that if it was going to be a boy she was against circumcision. My father replied, 'All right, and if it's a girl we won't baptize her.' So, I wasn't baptized. My parents loved each other dearly regardless of their differences: in age, nationality and intellect.

Family was everything for my father, and my mother found support and a faithful companion in him. The brightest memories of my childhood are associated with the time when my parents took me to a dacha [17](#) in summer. They rented a dacha out of town and took me there, every summer.

I didn't go to a kindergarten. I had a baby sitter who was a Russian girl from a village named Marfusha. She lived with us until the end of her life. My mother sent her to school. She completed secondary school. I have very good memories of her, as she always took care of me.

She evacuated with us and thanks to her skills and wit, we survived through the first days. Here is what my days in my childhood were like. I never went into the yard alone. I had friends who were our neighbors and they used to come to play with dolls, as I had many in our room. Sometimes my nanny and I went shopping. In the evening, when she had to go to school, she took me to the adjoining street where my mother's brother's family lived or to my grandmother.

My parents worked a lot and my father studied in the evening classes of the College of Railroad Transport Engineers. However, they always celebrated family holidays and birthdays. My mother and father's relatives joined us for these celebrations. My father's brother, Michael, often went on business trips and was an infrequent guest in our house. We often visited my paternal grandmother since she loved guests.

My mother worked near Grandmother's home and often went to see her. She usually had lunch there. My mother and her mother-in-law got along very well and there were no misunderstandings between them. My mother grew up in the family with no national prejudices. She did what their family had failed to do: she made my father study. My grandmother respected her very much.

The events of 1937 [Great Terror] had an effect on our family. My grandmother's second husband was arrested and never returned from the camps. We knew that something was going on, but there was no information about it. My parents were afraid of talking and I was too young to understand the situation.

- **During the war**

I remember the first day of the war very well. On 22nd June 1941 my parents and I went out of town to look for a dacha for rent. We went to the railway station by tram when my parents heard somebody saying that the war had begun. It was around 11am.

We returned home, turned on the radio and listened to the speech by Molotov [18](#). I understood that the war had begun and that it was very serious and that there was a lot to happen. Before this we had a feeling that something might happen. We lived in a quiet district, but on the first days of the war there were activities going on.

People barricaded windows on ground floors with bags of sand. Some workers began to excavate a pond in the schoolyard across the street from our house. It was to be a firewater reservoir. Instructors explained to tenants about air raids and where to hide in case of emergency.

We closed the windows and glued newspaper sheets on glass to prevent splinters from falling. Children helped adults with whatever they could do. There were rooms with tenants in the basement where we could come with our chairs in case of an emergency alarm. We also made a black-out with black curtains on the windows. I remember the first training alarm.

When we came outside to go to the basement I sensed some smell in the street, something different, a disturbing smell. We went into the basement with this sense of alarm. I put some of my clothing either upside down or forgot to put it on, something like that.

On 10th July, my nanny, grandmother and I, evacuated to Ufa [1,300 km from Moscow]. We evacuated with the aviation plant where my father's sister's husband, Matvey Goldin, was working. My nanny didn't want to leave Moscow, but my mother worked and couldn't leave her job since TASS was staying.

My grandmother had liver problems and hypertension and so my mother couldn't let me go with grandmother. It took my mother quite some effort to convince my nanny to go with us. When we were approaching Ufa our train was delayed. It turned out that there were too many old people and



children in our car. They couldn't work at the plant. They sorted out all passengers and those who could work went to Ufa and the rest of us were taken 25 kilometers south.

It was a small station and we actually got off in a field. There was a steppe, sun and heat. Then there came horse-drawn wagons from a village on the bank of the Belaya River. It was a Tatar village named Starye Kieshki. We were accommodated in huts.

A Tatar hut is a big room with a stove and plank beds with mattresses, pillows and blankets. The owners of the hut where we lodged didn't speak Russian. They knew a few words sufficient enough to agree about payment for the milk they provided. They just didn't understand that there were Jews among the newcomers. We stayed one night in this hut. There were many bugs and I remember that my grandmother stayed awake picking those bugs off me.

On the following morning my grandmother, who wasn't that old, put lipstick on her lips - she was coquettish - and went to look around. She discovered some buildings in the schoolyard that formerly served as classrooms. It was summer and the school was closed. She talked to the director and obtained permission for us to move into a classroom. We slept on laboratory desks. When school started in fall we continued living there. In the evening we put the desks together to sleep on them and in the morning before classes we put them in place and put our things into a closet.

My grandmother had some money, and my nanny went to work in the kolkhoz [19](#). We were very poor. Nanny came from a village and was very hard-working. Her earnings and our small vegetable garden - which was in the field and received from the kolkhoz - saved us from hunger. My nanny and grandmother grew vegetables.

My grandmother was not a gardener. They both planted onions which grew only in Marfusha's part of the garden. My grandmother got angry, 'you cheated me, and I did something wrong!' It turned out she planted her onions with their roots upward. The onions grew all right in the long run. We bought potatoes and milk from a store in the village.

When there was a delivery of vodka, enterprising villagers stood in line to buy vodka that they could exchange for fish from 16-year-old boys. My grandmother also had some cereals, but they didn't last long. Anyway, my grandmother tried to observe the kashrut. She didn't eat pork. Tatars don't eat pork either, they eat lamb. There was no synagogue.

I'm not sure, but I don't think my grandmother could observe Sabbath considering the hardships in our lives. I became very sad on the first day of fall when the school opened its doors for schoolchildren. I was eager to go to school, but in this village everything was in the Tatar language. I made friends with the children of the director of the school. They were two girls, almost the same age as I. I began to understand some Tatar. I wanted to go to school, but they didn't admit me.

My mother arrived in fall 1941. She evacuated to Kuibyshev [920 km from Moscow] with her TASS agency. She wrote letters to me and sent them to Starye Kieshki from there. She missed me a lot and worried about me, but later she obtained permission from her director to go to work as a TASS correspondent in Bashkiria. She didn't receive a salary and father sent us his certificate [issued to officers in the army for their families to receive money allowances].

We exchanged clothes for food. My mother talked to the director of our school in the village and he agreed to admit me. I was supposed to go to the first grade, but they admitted me to the second grade. I could count well. They didn't force me to speak the Tatar language. I just spoke what I could. I studied there until I became unwell and had to stay home. Next year I went to the same grade. In 1943 I managed to get to the third grade and studied there for some time.

In 1942, my nanny drowned. It was a hot summer and we went to swim in the river. There was still high water in the Belaya River and we found a pit filled with water. The water was very cold and Marfusha had an infarction.

She died that very moment. There was quite a story with her funeral. There was a Muslim cemetery and they didn't allow burying Christians there. They even discussed it at the kolkhoz council. They finally allowed us to bury her near the fence. Of course, her death was a terrible shock and catastrophe for us.

Later in the same year my father's sister Frieda and her son Yuli came to visit us. Her husband Matvey Goldin worked at a plant in Ufa. He lived in a hostel and wasn't allowed to accommodate her and their son in his room. My father at that time was finishing military school in Orenburg [1,400 km from Moscow].

Once he got leave, he came to visit us. After he left, my mother became awfully concerned since at that time military actions were approaching Stalingrad [920 km from Moscow] and my father might have needed to go there.

Some time later we began to receive children's books from my father. We didn't have the slightest idea what it could be until one day I opened a book and saw 'I am in MPR' written in the book. We understood that he was in the Mongolian People's Republic. There was training in his school.

They were to cover 40 kilometers of the Orenburg steppe in full marching order and my father got sunstroke. He was taken to hospital. It so happened that other cadets of his school were taken to Stalingrad, and my father was sent to the construction of a railroad in Mongolia since he had railroad education. He served there until 1944.

In November 1942 my uncle received a room in Ufa and my aunt, her son and my grandmother went to live with him. My mother and I lived with a Tatar family in their pise-walled hut near the school. They gave us a small room which had a separate entrance.

There was an outside toilet. We fetched water from a well in the yard, but this dwelling was still better than living in school. It was warm and we didn't have to leave it for a day like we did when lodging at the school. My mother and I were starving. My mother fell ill with tuberculosis.

My father's allowances were not enough. We grew potatoes and then had to pick them. My mother was too weak and at some point she sat on the ground and began to cry. She had lost over 30 kilos in weight since she fell ill. When my maternal grandmother saw her in Moscow after we returned home she said, 'You look like you've come from Majdanek [20](#). Skin and bones.'

There was a Russian family from Rybinsk living next door. It was a woman and two children. The woman's name was Evdokia Ivanovna. Her husband worked at the aviation plant that was evacuated to Ufa. He lived in a hostel and she couldn't live with him. This woman was very poor.

She could hardly support her two boys. She left her children with us when she went to visit her husband in Ufa. My mother invited Evdokia Ivanovna to live with us. We got along well and had a quiet life. At that time my grandmother was still staying with her daughter Frieda in Ufa.

In the summer of 1943 my mother received an invitation letter from the TASS agency in Moscow. We had to get to the railway station somehow. Evdokia Ivanovna went with us leaving her boys with another woman. There was a huge crowd at the railway station. All trains that passed by the station were overcrowded.

We stayed at the railway station for three days. My mother took me to a children's room to sleep at night, and she and Evdokia Ivanovna had to watch their line to get tickets. We finally got onto a train. My mother had to be in Moscow on time and we hardly managed. We arrived home at 5 in the morning.

My mother's sister Zhenia lived a few blocks away from us. To get there I had to cross two big streets. As soon as we came home my mother sent me to her sister and left for work. I was afraid of going there alone. When my aunt opened her door she gasped: it was only 7 o'clock in the morning; they had just got up when I showed up. We were so happy to be back in Moscow and find out that everything was fine with our home.

My mother began to make arrangements for me to go to school. I had studied in a Tatar school, but teachers in Moscow didn't care and refused to admit me to the third grade. I began to cry and the teacher softened a little and said, 'all right, girl, it's going to be the second grade.' I said, 'No, I don't want to go to the second grade!' I was so concerned about being the oldest in my class.

She said, 'All right, we admit you to the third grade on condition that based on the results of the first quarters [an academic year in USSR consists of four quarters and after each quarter students get their quarter marks] we shall decide whether you stay or go to the second grade.'

I didn't argue this time. However, I fell ill with angina. We were thin and exhausted and there were no vitamins. I returned to school one week before the end of the first quarter. I remember very well that we had a test in mathematics. I received an excellent mark for it and the issue of my staying in the third grade was closed.

I liked mathematics and wanted to become a teacher of mathematics. I only had one '4' mark in the Russian language and all '5' marks for the rest of the subjects. Well, there were few things where I didn't excel. I was a fatty and never went in for sports, but I liked dancing and always attended dancing classes.

I had many friends at school, in our house and in my mother's sister's family. My neighbors had two daughters of my age. We became friends before the evacuation. I joined the Komsomol at school. I was eager to become a Komsomol member. I lied to the commission when they asked me how old I was. The admission age was 14 and I said that I was, though I was under 14 at that time. I didn't take an active part in the Komsomol activities, but I believed in communist ideas, so strong was propaganda at the time.

By the end of the war construction of the Moscow metro began. My father, when he was young, worked at the construction of one of the first metro stations, and he was demobilized and employed by a metro company. In April 1944, we received a telegram saying: 'Meet me.' My

mother thought he was going to another front and when we met him in Moscow she asked, 'Where?' and he replied, 'To Moscow.' We were so happy!

- **Post-war**

My father became a boiler engineer in the metro construction department. In 1947, when the struggle against rootless cosmopolitans [see campaign against cosmopolitans] [21](#) began he was fired. He looked for a job in Moscow for eight months. He understood that this was a national segregation campaign, but there was nothing that could be done.

Besides his national origin, my father had another 'deficiency.' He didn't have a proletarian origin. I remember one funny incident. My father wrote in his application form that his father was a wagon driver. I was horrified and asked him, 'Do you mean to say that my grandmother's husband was a wagon driver?' and he replied, 'You just keep your mouth shut.'

' Shortly afterward I understood why my father wrote that his father was a driver. In this country drivers' children had a much easier life than educated people. We had a difficult life. My mother was the only breadwinner. Eight months later my father got a job in a boiler inspection company.

I didn't face any anti-Semitism at school. We had many Jewish teachers. I faced this later in my life. I finished school with a silver medal. I wanted to become a teacher of mathematics, but I had to face reality. I submitted my documents to Moscow University and went for the entrance interview [22](#).

They talked with me for over two hours. The temperature was 37 degrees, it was hot and I was wearing a woolen suit since this was the best outfit I had. I was almost dying of the heat. Then I got to know that I wasn't admitted. Everything in life became very gloomy.

Well, I pulled myself together and submitted my documents to the Mechanical Mathematic College. They rejected me. In the Bauman Higher Technical College they told me that admission was completed, although entrance exams hadn't started yet. They said there was only the Coal Mine Faculty left and I said I didn't mind studying at this faculty. They looked at me in amazement. I put them in a difficult position.

As a result, they rejected me there as well. My friend who was aware of my problems advised me to go to the Irrigation and Drainage College - now it's called Water Engineering College. I went there with my mother. The document submittal deadline was three days later. I showed the admission commission my school certificate and my silver medal and they admitted me.

When I became a student I understood that there were specific young people studying in our college. It was shortly before Stalin approved the nature transformation plan in 1951. It included drainage of swamp areas and irrigation of arid regions. Our college increased admission and cancelled any admission quotas. Our students were Jewish graduates with gold medals that failed to enter any other Moscow college.

It was a golden admission of talented young people. Many years later my fellow student once replied to my question of what made him choose this college, 'I knew that this was the only college that I could enter. I am a Jew and my father had been arrested.'

Our student life was delightful regardless of the hard practical and topographical trainings. I didn't like field work and heat. I remember how hard it was in Novgorod region: swamps, mosquitoes, heavy rubber boots and heavy equipment. I was afraid of swamps. I even felt like quitting this college, but my mother forbade me to do this. I managed to stay to the end of that training.

Our second training in Latvia was much easier and nicer. It was like a resort there. We went to swim and lay in the sun. Our local managers sent us to do work that wasn't too hard. We also had nice practical training that was full of fun. It was difficult, but enjoyable. However tired we got we danced and had fun until 2 o'clock in the morning. It was fabulous.

All graduates became good specialists and always recalled their teachers with gratitude. We were so close that we still get together every five years. Our former co-students arrive from all over the country and from abroad when they can.

We went to parades on Soviet holidays. It wasn't openly mandatory, but the public was aware of attendance of parades. Besides, we were young and there was music, dances and songs. It was a lot of fun. There were foreign students among us. One of them was Romanian. He once said it was his third year in Moscow, but he hadn't seen Stalin once. I told him he should walk with me, because even if Stalin wasn't on the stand during a parade he sure would make an appearance when I was walking across the Red Square. And it did happen. Stalin presented himself when we came to the Red Square. I shall never forget how delighted this Romanian student was. He said, 'I will write home today. I've seen Stalin!' I wasn't as excited as he.

I remember the Doctors' Plot [23](#) well. My uncle Matvey Goldin, Aunt Frieda's husband, had a sister. Her husband, Frumkin, was a professor of medicine. He was a renowned urologist and worked in the Botkin hospital. He wasn't arrested only because he had an infarction and was having treatment at his hospital. When officers came for him, the doctor on duty told them that in his condition, Professor Frumkin wouldn't manage the journey.

A friend of mine studied at the Medical College. This friend was Russian and seemed to be anti-Semitic to an extent. We once discussed a recent arrest of great doctors. He said to me, 'You know, there are almost no lecturers left' - meaning that Jewish lecturers were the best and when there was none of them left the remaining lecturers couldn't compete with them in professional skills. We didn't discuss those subjects at home. My mother taught me to say nothing about politics much too well. There is another story that I remember.

My co-student brought an issue of the Pravda newspaper [lit. Truth, a popular daily newspaper with multimillion circulation, the central organ of the Communist Party] to college, where an article about 'murderers in white robes' was published. I read it and said, 'How horrible!' She looked at me as if I were an idiot and whispered, 'Do you believe it?' I was horrified to hear that Pravda was not trustworthy.

Then Stalin died in 1953. My grandmother didn't like him and she didn't make a secret of it. I cannot say that I liked him that much, but intense propaganda imposed love of him onto people. When Stalin died we had a meeting in our college. Many girls were crying, but I didn't feel like crying. I understood that this was an epoch-making event.

After classes we were planning to go to the Kolonnyi Hall where the casket with his body was. Nobody forced us to go there, but we walked to the place. We walked together trying to find the end of line to his casket, but then we lost each other in the crowd. All of a sudden there was a jam and I got scared. I got out of the crowd and returned home.

Aunt Frieda Goldina lived near the Kolonnyi Hall where the casket with Stalin was. She told me later that she said to herself, 'I shall not calm down until I see him in the casket.' She went there across backdoors and roofs until she got to an entrance where she was allowed to go in. Our family began to discuss political subjects a long time after Stalin died.

I finished college and was waiting for my [mandatory] job assignment [24](#). I wanted to work in Rosgiprovdokhoz: irrigation and drainage system design institute doing work in Russia. I had practical training in this institute. They offered me a job in its Minsk affiliate. I didn't want to lose my permission for a residence permit [25](#) in Moscow. Then I got another offer to go to Tuva expedition of Rosgiprovdokhoz to the town of Kyzyl [3720 km from Moscow]. It was just a business trip and I signed for this job assignment. My co-student went there with me. It was a long trip. We learned many new things that we didn't know living in Moscow.

Once on a train we met a German [colonist] [26](#) family, deported to Siberia by Stalin during World War II. Only in 1956, they were allowed to visit their ancestors' graves in Engels [880 km from Moscow]. They told us how they were suppressed for many years and I thought it was terrible that people weren't allowed to visit their ancestors' graves.

We did design work. The climate was severe. Winter lasted five months and temperatures dropped to minus 60 degrees Celsius. It was freezing outside. I was the only one in the town who didn't wear woolen boots. It was a strange climate. You go outside and find yourself in a thick fog and you feel like you're walking in milk without seeing the road.

Cars drive with their lights and horns on. The town is surrounded by the Sayan Mountain range. I had never seen more beautiful nature before. It turned out that except me and my co-student, all other employees were either convicts or members of their family. They were people with interesting and complicated life stories though they were nice people.

A year later I was assigned to work in Moscow. I went to work in Rosgiprovdokhoz. I worked successfully there for one-and-a-half or two months when I was fired all of a sudden. The children of higher officials had graduated from colleges and needed jobs. Besides, my last name was added to the list of unreliable employees - Jews.

I was fired regardless of the mandatory three-year term of postgraduate assignment. I couldn't find a job for a long time. I went to many companies and they all refused to hire me. It was all because of my surname and Semitic appearance. A long while later I got a job at the Giprostesneft' Institute designing potable and industrial water supply for the oil industry.

I worked there for 33 years until I retired. I went on interesting business trips and had an interesting and multifarious job. I liked my work. From engineer I was promoted to project chief engineer. I was the leader of a group and worked independently, but I never went on trips abroad.

I lived in one room with my parents until 1964. I turned 30 and wanted to live separately. I got an opportunity to buy a one-bedroom cooperative apartment. In 1968, I finished a two-year course in



English at the College of Foreign Languages. I wasn't a member of the Party. This fact and my Jewish identity didn't allow me to get a job anywhere abroad. The secretary of our party unit didn't approve a letter of recommendation for me for traveling abroad. He was an anti-Semite. Everybody at work knew I was a Jew. I didn't consider changing my surname. My father was a Jew and it would have hurt him if I had changed my name. Besides, I didn't want to deny my Jewish identity. My husband Yuzef Kirtzer was also a Jew.

My colleague introduced me to my future husband. He was her distant relative. She gave him my telephone number. He called me, we met and liked each other. He then proposed to me. We got married in 1965; there was no wedding party. We just went for a walk and when we were going past a registry office we dropped in and registered our marriage. We started our family life in my apartment.

My husband was born in Dnepropetrovsk [800 km from Moscow] in Ukraine. He finished lower secondary school and entered an art school. He was good at drawing. His family was of moderate wealth. They lived in a small two- bedroom apartment in the center of the city. My husband's father, Michael Kirtzer, worked in a cultural center. He was a cheerful and joyful man. He had a big sense of humor and everybody liked him. He was hardworking and reliable. His mother, Mariasa Kirtzer, sewed at home. She had a difficult and tragic life. At the beginning of the century she witnessed a Jewish pogrom in Ukraine [27](#).

A Ukrainian family gave shelter to her, but she could hear how people were killed behind the wall. It affected her psyche and never passed. They also had a younger daughter named Sonia. She was three years younger than my husband. She was good at music and had a good voice, but regretfully, her family couldn't afford to give her education and her gift had no further development. She took part in amateur concerts where she sang. Later, she worked as a medical statistics operator in a children's polyclinic.

When the Great Patriotic War began my husband was mobilized to the army. He was a 2nd-year student at that time. He went to a military infantry school in Vladikavkaz. Then he was commanding officer of an infantry platoon near Stalingrad and chief of battalion headquarters at the southwestern front.

He was severely wounded in his head near Dnepropetrovsk. He lost an eye and was taken to hospital. After he was released from hospital, he went to serve in a district military registry office in Novosibirsk [2,800 km from Moscow, in the north of Russia]. He was demobilized in January 1946.

At that time, his family was living in Moscow. His father received a room in a barrack and his family got together in his room. They didn't have much money, but they decided to support their son and help him get a higher education.

Yuzef graduated from the Leningrad Industrial-Art High School very successfully. After finishing his college he did contractual jobs as it was difficult to find a permanent job. Then he went to work as a teacher of an art subject in the Theatrical Art School. He worked in this school until he retired in 1990.

Then he worked at the department of art of the Moscow Pedagogical College. At that time his textbook in drawing for secondary and special educational institutions was published. It's still very

popular. Besides, he did creative work for students' performances. He was a talented and extraordinary man and he had such a difficult life. He lost his eye, but he got education and became a specialist. It required courage and strong will. He was very sociable and had many friends.

Before we got married he came to visit my family, but he didn't invite me to his home. He was ashamed of his poor household. After we got married he liked to have guests. We had an open house and there were always guests. My co-students came and he invited artists and students. We had guests on holidays and particularly many guests on Victory Day [28](#). We always celebrated holidays, but Victory Day was a holy day.

My husband participated in the veterans' movement. They had meetings on 9th May, Victory Day. I went to these meetings with him. I still attend these meetings, though many veterans and my husband are gone. The children of the veterans and I go to the meetings.

My husband's attitude to Jewish subjects was one of love and great interest. He was interested in the Jewish culture and history, but he wasn't religious and we didn't observe Jewish traditions at home. He couldn't stand anti-Semites and could even give a physical response to their demonstrations. But still, he was a man of the Russian culture.

Many of his relatives moved to Israel. We corresponded with them. He never considered emigration as he valued his profession and his place in this profession. Once we talked about departure. My cousin brother, Yuri Goldin, emigrated to America in the 1970s and spoke to us about moving there with him. My husband said he would have no objections if I decided to go there, but that he would stay.

Our son was born on 8th March 1966. Of course, it was a big joy. My husband was delighted: A son! We named him Michael after his grandfather, my husband's father, who didn't live to the day. My mother helped me a lot. She came to stay with my son every day when I went to work. He was raised at home in his first years of life and then he went to a kindergarten.

In 1968 we moved to another apartment. We exchanged my husband's and my apartment for a two-bedroom apartment near my parents' apartment, and my mother could come to stay with our son. My son was a terrible pupil at school. He didn't like school and received only '3' marks.

He left school after finishing the eighth grade. He entered a medical school. I remember all my suffering at parents' meetings at school where they always reprimanded my son for poor results, and I told my husband that it was his turn to attend parents' meetings at the medical school since I had fulfilled my duty at school meetings. It happened so that he couldn't make it for a meeting when our son was a 2nd-year student and I had to go. I was shocked when my son's teacher spoke praises of my son.

She said he had logical thinking, medical biological thinking and he had talents and that he would make it to medical college. My son was a devoted student. When they had practical training, working in an ambulance, all other students finished at 6pm and I called the ambulance at 2 in the morning and they told me that my son went on calls. He was ready to work there round the clock.

After graduating from this school he went to work at the ambulance. Then he went to serve in the army. He served in a construction battalion. It was difficult there. They did hard work and didn't get

sufficient food. As a result, my son got into hospital. I went there to talk to the doctor, and he told me that he was surprised that my son was in the army at all.

In his military identity card it was written that he was only fit for military service during wartime. We involved my husband's acquaintances and managed to arrange for my son's transfer to a different unit. He served in a medical unit there and had an opportunity to learn.

After he returned from the army he resumed his work at the ambulance. My son is a very active person. He went to where emergencies happened: earthquakes in Georgia, Iran, and to the locations where blood-shedding conflicts occurred. There was an initiative group formed in the government of Russia and he had a doctor's position there.

In 1993, my son married a Russian girl. His wife, Anastasia Levashova, graduated from two colleges: the Mining College, where she got the profession of systems analyst, and Law College. She works for a private company. They have two daughters: Anastasia, born in 1999, and Evdokia, born in 2001. They live nearby. My son finished evening classes of the medical college in 1995. He is a children's doctor. Then he finished residency, and now he works at the Kommersant commercial house as a family doctor.

We didn't raise our son in the spirit of Jewish traditions as we didn't observe any. My son became interested in the history of the Jewish people in his teens. He had many Jewish friends at school. They went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays. Periodically, he talked of moving to Israel or America, but then he thought otherwise when in the 1990s perestroika [29](#) began and he decided that life would be interesting here. My son identifies himself as a Jew, though he doesn't observe traditions or holidays.

My father worked a lot in various boiler inspection companies. He dealt in fuel saving issues and frequently went on business trips. He was a strong, healthy man. Once in 1976, he felt ill and was taken to hospital. The doctor said that his condition was too severe.

In 1974, my father's brother Michael died. He was three years older than my father. My father said then that he would die three years later. It did happen. In 1977 he died at home of an infarction. He had turned 71. My father told us to cremate him when he died. He was big and heavy and it would be hard to carry the casket. He always cared about us and tried to save us from troubles.

His sister and her husband and our relatives came to the funeral. We buried him in Kalitnikovskoye cemetery where my mother's relatives were buried. It was a town cemetery, and we didn't observe any Jewish customs at the funeral. My mother was old and had hearing problems, but it took some time before she agreed to move in with us.

In 1978, we exchanged our two apartments for this one. She died of an infarction in 1984. My son was working in the ambulance. He made artificial respiration, but it didn't work. We buried her in Kalitnikovskoye cemetery near my father's grave.

I retired in 1992. I always wanted to be a teacher. I decided to implement this after I retired and went to work as a teacher of geography at a school. I received a very low salary since I didn't have previous experience, but I liked this job. I had training and studied at the Teachers' Advanced Training College.

I worked at school from 1993 till 1999. After six years of work I understood that it was good that I hadn't become a teacher. There are many negative things in our educational system. There is a lot of tension at school, suppression of free development of personality - I didn't like it. I also taught the history and geography of Moscow. I like Moscow very much. I studied its history. It is also the history of my family.

On Saturdays I went on city tours with the schoolchildren and their parents. I remember one episode. I showed my pupils a school in the center of Moscow. There is a monument for the boys who perished during World War II in front of this school.

My pupils were surprised to see so many Jewish names engraved on the monument. They asked, 'Were Jews at the front as well?' - There were rumors spread in Moscow in the first years after the war that there were no Jews at the front. I believe they were spread by relevant authorities. I think that one of the biggest accomplishments of my pedagogical activities was the extraction of anti-Semitic ideas from my pupils' heads.

Our family was very enthusiastic about perestroika that began when Gorbachev [30](#) came to power. His personality inspired hope. He had a university degree and was a relatively young man. In 1986, my father's sister Frieda told me that she became weak in her knees after she heard on the radio that it was allowed to meet with relatives from abroad.

Her only son Yuli had emigrated to America in 1978. A year later she visited her son. What impressed me at the beginning of perestroika was that we could watch the films that we could never believe we would ever be allowed to see.

The first shock for me was the film by Abuladze titled Repentance [film by renowned Soviet producer Tenghiz Abuladze (1924-1994); the first film in cinematography that denounced the cult of Stalin.] We often went to unforgettable meetings in the House of Actors. There was an interesting meeting with a writer whose last name was Klimov.

He was arrested before the war and rehabilitated right after Stalin died. He said, 'I get an impression that the same people arrested, interrogated, put to court and rehabilitated us.'

My husband's Jewish friends Ilia Lempert and David Silis, talented sculptors, opened their personal exhibition in Moscow for the first time. At the opening ceremony, a wonderful children's book writer, Yuriy Koval, said, 'Would it ever have occurred to us that they would allow the display of works rejected by the party press?'

Broadcasting of meetings of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR made a great impression on us. We had never seen anything like that. Every word of Academician Sakharov [31](#) inspired hopes and his sudden death was a terrible shock. The loss of this man who we believed was the conscience of the nation was irreplaceable.

There were other events, for example in the institute where I worked. We used to be given standard scopes of work and maximum three percent over this scope was allowed to be completed. Now we have no restrictions. We worked a lot hoping to receive more money for our work. However, nobody intended to pay us money.

The Prime Minister issued an order limiting the amount of salaries that enabled directors of enterprises to use this money to their discretion. As a result, our director became a co-founder of a bank. Then they began to sell the assets of our institute. They sold a logistics base of the research department. Our managers were building dachas and buying cars. They began to fire employees. I was one of the first to be forced to quit due to my independent thinking.

I also spent three days in August 1991 near the White House during the Putsch [see 1991 Moscow coup d'etat] [32](#). I missed work since I believed it to be my duty to protect young Russian democracy. The radio announced gratitude to all participants of this event and there was an order to pay for these three days as working days, but my management didn't approve of it.

By this time my husband got diabetes. He always took care of his health, but diabetes weakened him and his first infarction became the last one. This happened at home. He fell ill at night. We should have called our son, but my husband didn't allow me to. In the morning I called my son, he made a cardiogram that showed an infarction.

My son helped his father get into a good hospital. He was taken to reanimation. He died a day later. When he died, we began to think how we should bury him. He used to tell me that he wanted to be buried, but his father and mother were cremated and their cinerary urns were in the crematorium. I was thinking of burying him in Kalitnikovskoye cemetery near the graves of my parents. My husband's sister didn't agree to bury my husband in this Christian cemetery.

She recommended that we bury Yuzef near grandmother and Uncle Michael's graves in the Jewish section of Vostriakovskoye cemetery. We buried him there and his friends made a beautiful gravestone. No Jewish traditions were observed.

I am a pensioner now. The pension that I receive is about 70 USD. It would not be enough for a decent living. I have another source of income. There were two sisters living in the next-door apartment. They didn't have any close relatives. When they grew older and became ill I attended to them and they left their apartment to me. I lease it and have some additional money from the rent.

Not based on halakhah, but based on my senses, I identify myself as Jew, although my mother is Russian and I am a person of the Russian culture. Thus, my father, his mother, my grandmother, my husband and son, my dear ones are Jews and I am with them. Besides, due to my Jewish looks I had to face many bitter moments in my life. The system pushed me into the embrace of the Jewish people and I lived through humiliation and suppression with them.

- **Glossary:**

## **1 Cantonist**

The cantonists were Jewish children who were conscripted to military institutions in tsarist Russia with the intention that the conditions in which they were placed would force them to adopt Christianity. Enlistment for the cantonist institutions was most rigorously enforced in the first half of the 19th century.

It was abolished in 1856 under Alexander II. Compulsory military service for Jews was introduced in 1827. Jews between the age of 12 and 25 could be drafted and those under 18 were placed in the cantonist units. The Jewish communal authorities were obliged to furnish a certain quota of army recruits.

The high quota that was demanded, the severe service conditions, and the knowledge that the conscript would not observe Jewish religious laws and would be cut off from his family, made those liable for conscription try to evade it.. Thus, the communal leaders filled the quota from children of the poorest homes.

## **2 Russian-Turkish War**

the war between Russia and Turkey in 1877-1878. The Russian army won a victory near Plevna town and liberated Bulgaria from the Turkish yoke.

## **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

## **4 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death

## **5 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **6 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **7 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (real name Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer, pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was



murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

## **8 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison.

The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'.

By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953

## **9 Five percent quota**

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students

## **10 Deprives**

After the revolution of 1917 people that had at least minor private property (owned small stores or shops) or small businesses were deprived of their property and were commonly called 'deprives' [derived from Russian 'deprive'].

Between 1917 middle of 1930s this part of population was deprived of civil rights and their children were not allowed to study in higher educational institutions. Communists declared themselves to protect the interests of the oppressed working class and peasants and only representatives of these classes enjoyed all civil rights.

## **11 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education.

The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **12 Lenin Award**

highest award in the USSR for accomplishments in the field of science, engineering, literature, art

and architecture. Established in 1925; was awarded before 1991.

### **13 Old Believers**

As their name suggests, all of them rejected the reformed service books, which Patriarch Nikon introduced in the 1650s and preserved pre-Nikonian liturgical practices in as complete a form as canonical regulations permitted. For some Old Believers, the defense of the old liturgy and traditional culture was a matter of primary importance; for all, the old ritual was at least a badge of identification and a unifying slogan.

The Old Believers were united in their hostility toward the Russian state, which supported the Nikonian reforms and persecuted those who, under the banner of the old faith, opposed the new order in the church and the secular administration.

To be sure, the intensity of their hostility and the language and gestures with which they expressed it varied as widely as their social background and their devotional practices. Nevertheless, when the government applied pressure to one section of the movement, all of its adherents instinctively drew together and extended to their beleaguered brethren whatever help they could.

### **14 Meyerhold, Vsevolod (1874-1940)**

Russian theater director. In 1920, he was appointed head of the theater division of the People's Commissariat for Education. In the early communist years, Meyerhold staged many notable productions. Beginning in 1923, Meyerhold had his own troupe in Moscow, and staged innovative productions of both classics and modern works.

By the mid- 1930s, Meyerhold's relentless experimentation was no longer in favor. His theater was harshly criticized and then closed in 1938. Meyerhold himself was arrested in 1939 and shot in prison in 1940.

### **15 Koltsov Michail (1898-1942?)**

Born Friedland, Soviet publicist and public activist. Chief Editor of the popular magazines 'Ogonyok,' 'Krokodil,' 'Za rubezhom' and member of the editorial staff of Pravda, the major Soviet Daily.

From 1936-1938 he participated in the Civil War in Spain as correspondent of Pravda, was political counselor at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain, had direct contacts with Stalin. Arrested in 1938; perished in prison.

### **16 Communal apartments**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **17 Dacha**

country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

## **18 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **19 Kolkhoz**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **20 Majdanek concentration camp**

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building. The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed.

Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

## **21 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of

Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **22 Entrance interview**

graduates of secondary schools awarded silver or gold medals (cf: graduates with honors in the U.S.) were released from standard oral or written entrance exams to the university and could be admitted on the basis of a semi-formal interview with the admission committee. This system exists in state universities in Russia and most of the successor states up to this day.

## **23 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt.

As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **24 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

## **25 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

## **26 German colonists/colony**

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

## **27 Pogroms in Ukraine**

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

## **28 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

## **29 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

## **30 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

## **31 Sakharov, Andrey (1921-1989) was a Soviet physicist who became, in the words of the Nobel Peace Committee, a spokesman for the conscience of mankind**

Physicist, academician of the AS USSR since 1953, father of the Soviet Union hydrogen bomb, three times hero of socialist labor.

In early 1960s and early 1970s he was the leader of fighters for human rights. He was an outspoken advocate of human rights, civil liberties, and reform in the Soviet Union. Winner of the 1975 Nobel Prize in Peace. Because of his political activities, he was exiled to Gorkiy in 1980. Sakharov was permitted to return to Moscow in December 1986. Elected to the new Congress of People's Deputies in April 1989, he remained a leading spokesman for human rights and political and economic reform until his death on December 14, 1989.

## **32 1991 Moscow coup d'etat**

Starting spontaneously on the streets of Moscow, its leaders went public on 19th August. TASS (Soviet Telegraphical Agency) made an announcement that Gorbachev had been relieved of his

duties for health reasons. His powers were assumed by Vice President Gennady Yanayev. A State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) was established, led by eight officials, including KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, and Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov.

Seizing on President Mikhail Gorbachev's summer absence from the capital, eight of the Soviet leader's most trusted ministers attempted to take control of the government. Within three days, the poorly planned coup collapsed and Gorbachev returned to the Kremlin. But an era had abruptly ended. The Soviet Union, which the coup plotters had desperately tried to save, was dead.