

# Kofman Raikhchin

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Interviewer: Olga Egudina

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*I met Kofman Wolfovich in his cozy and hospitable apartment. It was rather difficult for me to settle the date of our meeting because Kofman Wolfovich leads a very active life. Meetings with friends, trips out of the city, visits to the synagogue - he has time and energy to do everything.*

*He speaks slowly and in low tones. Like a painter's brush, his words draw for us first scenes of his childhood which he spent in a small provincial town, then terrible episodes of war. It is a great pleasure to meet Kofman Wolfovich and listen to him. No doubt we are very lucky that he agreed to share his memories with us.*



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## **My family background**

I remember nothing about my great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers. I did not see them alive and I do not remember any stories about them.

The most distant relatives whom I remember are my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandfather. To tell the truth, I met my grandmother only several times. She lived in Turov town in Belarus, not far from us and came to visit us sometimes. Her name was Tsipere. Our family lived in Petrikov town (60 kilometers far from my grandmother's place). Our towns were very much alike. At that time in Belarus there were many small towns where a great part of population was Jewish. There it was customary to give people nicknames according to the name of place they came from. For example my father was called Velvl de Babunichi (i.e. Velvl from Babunichi). Babunichi was a small village in Belarus. So now I know that my father was born in Babunichi. Only judging by his nickname I could understand where my father was from. Regarding my grandmother, I remember that she had a domineering disposition in the town. Her husband died early in life and I do not know how she earned for living. She had only 2 children. I say only, because at that time poor

Jewish families used to have much more children. You know that nowadays a family with 2 children is considered to have many children.

Unfortunately I remember nothing about my father's sister: I even forgot her name. I remember only that she and her husband lived in Baku [now Azerbaijan]. I also remember almost nothing about my mother's parents. I was named in honor of my mother's father. So it becomes clear that he had died before I was born. He was a manager of woods at a rich Polish landowner Tadeush. Father told that sir Tadeush liked to play chess with my grandfather. My grandfather was a good player, but just in case (not to provoke wrath of sir Tadeush) he gave him odds. And the landowner used to discover his intentions and say 'Oh you, cunning Jew!' My grandfather had 16 children. I do not remember their names and details of their biographies. My information is most scanty. One of them was lost during the Russian Civil War of 1918-1920 [1](#), the other one fell a prey to pogroms. Two of them emigrated to America during the first years after the Revolution of 1917. My parents corresponded with them till 1947, then their correspondence was interrupted, and I was afraid to recommence. I already studied at the College (it was in 1947), when I received a parcel from our American relatives. It contained clothing: unprecedented luxury in those times. But my College friends said 'Be careful!' - It is strange that nothing happened after that parcel: do you know how it was called? It was called relations with people who left abroad! Therefore I even did not thank them for the parcel. Sure, I am ashamed for it, but persons who lived in this country at that time can understand it.

Parents of my father were religious and my father inherited religiousness from them. He studied in cheder and later in yeshivah.

Sister of my father was younger than him; I do not remember her name. She lived in Baku (now Azerbaijan) together with her husband. She had 2 children.

I was born in 1924 in Petrikov town and lived there till the beginning of the war, when I was 17 years old.

Petrikov was a small town (its population was about 5,000). There lived quite a lot Jews: 1 Jewish school among 5 ones in total. I studied at that school during 7 years. The school was not just a traditional Jewish one, but Soviet-Jewish: they taught us in Yiddish, but never discussed religious topics. In our town there were woodworking plant and brickworks, therefore sidewalks were made of planks and roadways were made of bricks. I do not remember any consolidated Jewish community in our town. There were 2 synagogues: for men and for women. My father visited the synagogue regularly till 1937. There were no special Jewish residential areas in our town: people of different nationalities lived where they liked. Most Jews of our town were handicraftsmen, but I also remember many Jews in the government's employ.

The town was built on the River Pripyat, which became notorious all over the world for the Chernobyl disaster. [Chernobyl disaster was the largest damage of nuclear power station in the history of mankind: it resulted in atmospheric contamination in all European countries, and in particular the river Pripyat was poisoned.] Because of the original relief, the town was divided into 2 parts: upper and lower one. At first we lived in the lower part (low-lying lands) of the town. Every spring high water flooded that part of the town. Water reached window sills. It was impossible to stay at home. Therefore all members of our family moved (by boats) to our neighbors - Byelorussians, who lived a little bit higher. Sometimes we had to stay at our neighbors for a

fortnight. Herefrom it becomes clear that our relations with neighbors were the most kind despite of nationalities. During my life in Petrikov I never came across any manifestations of anti-Semitism. I both never faced it myself and never watched anything of that kind regarding other people. Everybody respected one another, respected other's culture and religion. Many Russians and Belarussians spoke Yiddish.

In our house there were 3 rooms. We had no water or electricity supply. The house was heated by Russian stove [2](#), we used it also for cooking meals. We had rather large vegetable garden, which helped us very much: as who should say, it fed us. We always had a cow.

Several years later, when my father's salary increased a little we managed to buy a house in the upper part of the town. At that time I was 7. In our new house there were 5 rooms and it seemed to us a palace. Parents placed a room at the boys' disposal (to go in for photography). It was all that could be desired! There we also had a large vegetable garden and a large apple orchard.

My father worked as a supplier. He went round the neighboring villages by cart and bought dried mushrooms, berries, dressed skins and so forth. On the territory of the town market my father had a special room, where people from the neighboring villages could bring agricultural production and sell it to my father, earning some money for it. Later all products were put on sale.

Our family was very loyal politically, my parents never criticized actions of authorities, and at least they never did it in presence of their children. My father was always very interested in politics, both foreign and internal. He was a talented public speaker. When he started talking about something, people gathered around him (wherever it happened) to listen to his speech. I remember that during the civil war in Spain [3](#) my father made a fiery speech (I guess inspiration found him at the town market). The import of his speech was to hand land in Granada to peasants. ['...To hand land in Granada to peasants' is a citation from Granada, a poem by Michael Svetlov. Michael Svetlov (Sheynkman) was a Russian Soviet poet. He was born in 1903 and died in 1964.] Father suggested contributing to relief fund for Spanish republicans. And people immediately started collecting money.

Great Terror [4](#) did not leave our town aside. I remember quite well the following episode: in our kitchen stove at our place father is burning certificates of honor which he was awarded with during many years of his work. From conversation of my parents I understand that these certificates were signed by various important figures already shot by that time, and it is better to get rid of them to get out of harm's way.

At school every morning was begun with a question: 'Whose father was arrested this night?' It was very seldom when nobody was taken away. And you understand that it happened in our small town!

Celebration of Russian religious holidays always came to the same end: some Russian neighbor came running to us to save herself from being beaten by her drunk husband. On revolutionary holidays (November 7 [5](#) and May 1) they arranged demonstrations, which I always participated in. [May 1 was the state holiday in the USSR: the Day of the International Solidarity of Workers.]

Our family observed kashrut. Several Jewish women used to buy a ram by clubbing together and take it to shochet. They did the same with hens. They used to send children for easier purchases.

Before Pesach women made matzah by turns in every Jewish house. It turned out that Russian stove just touched the spot for making matzah.

My father was born in 1890. His name was Velvl (Wolf) Raikhchin. He finished cheder and yeshivah. Father participated in the World War I, was taken prisoner, moved to Germany and worked there for a German burgher as an assistant on his farm. He lived there for about 3 years, having kept warmest memoirs about the owner. These memoirs nearly cost him his head, when the Great Patriotic War burst out [6](#). But I am going to tell you about it in due time.

After my father was delivered from captivity, he arrived in Petrikov. I do not know the reason why he chose Petrikov: I guess it was the nearest settlement larger than his native village. He began working as a supplier. Later he became a manager at the regional food products warehouse. A special building was constructed for it. It was large and made of bricks. In this country people always lacked food products (both during war and peace time). Therefore a person who was a master at a food products warehouse always (so to say) stood high esteem of everybody around. For example, a municipal official came to him and asked his assistance in buying a bottle of vodka. Well, was it possible to refuse? But father tried to decrease this sort of contacts to the lowest notch. By the way, thanks to my father's position we sometimes had an opportunity to go by a lorry which delivered food products to shops.

Father tried to teach me religion and tradition, but unfortunately I was interested in it very little.

My Mum was born at the end of 1890s. Her name was Haya, nee Fridman. Most probably she was born in Poland. By the time of father's return from the front line, she already lived in Petrikov, and I don't know how she had got there. Their marriage was arranged by matchmaker (shadkhan). They got married in 1921. Their wedding took place in the synagogue according to tradition (chuppah, etc.).

Mum was very kind, very attentive and full of love to her children. We often got ill and she nursed us, regardless of her own health. She had to keep large house and vegetable garden, take care about the cow. All this adversely affected her health and Mum died an early death from heart disease: she was a little over forty. It happened in 1940. I remember that during her funeral ceremony father suddenly said 'Nobody knows where our bones will lie.' You know, his words appeared to be prophetic: neither he, nor his elder son happened to be buried beside her.

Father was much more strict than Mum. His life was also not easy. He assumed obligations for hard work at home. He had to saw and cut fire wood, to bring water for vegetable garden! He never beat his children, but sometimes he gave us fits.

Mother tongue of my parents was Yiddish. We all spoke only Yiddish at home. Naturally I considered Yiddish to be my mother tongue, too. When I entered College, I had to fill in a questionnaire, there I wrote Yiddish regarding my mother tongue. The Head of the 1st department sent for me and said 'You'd better change it for something better.' [In the USSR 1st departments were responsible for keeping vigilant watch over loyalty of employees. The 1st department of each institution was closely connected with NKVD [7](#) and KGB [8](#).]

My father visited synagogue regularly. Mum went there very seldom and children never did it. Moreover, at our Jewish school there was a group named Light Horse. To my shame I was its

member. We had to go along the streets and look into windows to find people celebrating Pesach or Shabbath. We were obliged to explain them their mistakes.

At home we celebrated all Jewish holidays and every Shabbath. You know, as is customary at Jewish house, you can be hungry all the week long, but on Saturday you will have chicken, gefilte fish, etc. on your table. As for me, most of all I liked Pesach. I liked both meal and action with asking questions, searching afikoman, etc. All boys of our family were circumcised, but parents did not arrange bar mitzvah for us: there came a time when it was dangerous.

At home we never had any assistants. To tell the truth, all children from early age did everything to be best of their ability.

Financial position of our family was more than modest. Only father earned money, having 4 children. I know it for sure that without vegetable garden and the cow we would be not able to survive.

Members of our family had no idea about holidays. On days off father brought us to woods. Woods around our town were very good; they were very close to houses. We liked to collect mushrooms and berries very much, they were of great use for our family in winter: we used to dry mushrooms. I do not remember Mum making jam: I guess sugar was too expensive.

My parents never wore traditional clothes. They always put on very modest secular clothes.

At home there were only religious and children's books. Number of religious books was great. When I studied at the Jewish school, we read books in Yiddish written by Jewish children's writers. Later we began to read in Russian and in Belarus language. We had no system in reading: there was nobody to advise. For example, Mum never read books. As for me, I was an active reader of school library. I was interested in books of cognitive character: reference books, encyclopedias. I borrowed them from our school library. Father subscribed for the Der Emis (it means The Truth) newspaper in Yiddish. It was published in Moscow. Besides father always demanded that children should bring daily newspapers (central and Belarus). So every morning we ran to a newsstand to buy lots of newspapers. When I grew up a little, I began reading Pionerskaya Pravda children's newspaper.

One of mother's sisters lived in our city (I do not remember her name). She often visited us. She was much more educated, than my parents, therefore we liked to have a talk with her on different topics, we asked her about everything and she answered our questions willingly.

## **Growing up**

When I was little, I did not attend a kindergarten, I stayed at home with Mum, my brothers and my sister. I do not remember Mum amusing us by doing something special. But we were in good health. We always had what to do about the house and in the vegetable garden irrespective of age: weeding, watering, destruction of caterpillars and Colorado beetles, protection of vegetables and fruit from crows, and again weeding.

I went to school at the age of 6. I was not a child prodigy, but I had an elder brother (he was 2 years older than me). We attended cheder together with him. To tell the truth cheder was at our place: melamed visited us at home. In 1930 authorities started struggle against religion [9](#) and parents stopped inviting melamed. It was time for my brother to go to school, and there was no

place for me to go, therefore parents sent us together to the same class. Our school was Jewish, all subjects were taught in Yiddish. Russian was taught as a foreign language. At our school there was a very good director Pachevsky. Teachers were qualified and respected children. I was very good at chemistry. I remember a teacher of mathematics: a real dragon, but a square shooter and a very good teacher. And our director taught us both Russian and Yiddish. By the way they studied in yeshivah together with my father in their time. And one more: in Leningrad I studied in the same students' group with the nephew of our director. It's a small world, indeed!

Besides my school I had many hobbies. In our town there was a special institution named Children's Technical Station. I attended there groups of aircraft modeling and radio one. There were a lot of sports groups, too. I went in for track and field athletics at the stadium. Most friends of mine were my schoolmates: some of them were elder, others were younger than me. During our studies in the groups teachers spoke their mother tongues: sometimes Russian, sometimes Belarus language, and sometimes Yiddish. I never went anywhere for vacation.

I was an Oktyabrenok [10](#), and a pioneer [11](#), and a Komsomol member [12](#).

In 1937 when I finished the 7th class, our school became extinct as a Jewish one. [In 1918 Soviet authorities permitted national minorities to teach their children at schools in their mother tongue. But in 1938 they issued an edict ordering to teach all schoolchildren in Russian.] It became Belarussian. There came a lot of children who finished rural seven-year schools. Teachers started teaching in Belarus language, and Russian was still taught as a foreign language. Here I'd like to tell you that my sister studied at our Jewish school her first three years, and then parents sent her to a Russian school, though by that time our Jewish school still functioned. You see, parents understood that studies at a Jewish school give no good outlook for a child. Other parents understood it too and stopped sending their children to the Jewish school.

Now I'd like to tell you about my brothers and sisters.

My elder brother Paltiel was born in 1922. He did not come back from war: he was killed in 1944 in Lithuania. My brother was prodigy. At school he was interested in physics, mathematics, and astronomy. He studied at different circles together with me. He was my first and best friend. I am sure Paltiel could have achieved much, but he was killed so early in life. He left for front from Petrikov. Later we left for evacuation and knew nothing about him (he knew nothing about us, too). At that time a radiobroadcast was devoted to people bereaved of their relatives. Thanks to that broadcast, my brother found us, and we corresponded till the day of his death.

My sister Sofiya was born in 1926 in Petrikov (like all of us). She studied at Jewish school, then at Russian one. After the end of the war she returned to Petrikov. They found a groom for her in Bobruisk (oh, that everlasting fame of shadkhanim!). That person (his family name was Zaichik) was a loyal supporter of soviet political regime all his life long. He held a high post in the national education institution. When authorities started struggling against cosmopolitanism [13](#), he was dismissed and sent to a school in the suburb of the town as a teacher. Soon he became a director of that school. But as soon as it became possible to emigrate to Israel, he immediately got ready for a trip to Israel. People tried to persuade him to stay here, he was offered different posts, but he was inexorable. He said 'I cannot live in the country which treated me that way.' They left in 1979 with their 3 sons. My sister did not study anywhere after school, but she managed to master profession of bookkeeper without any assistance.



My second brother Isaac was born in 1928 in Petrikov. By the beginning of the war he finished only 4 classes. When we reached the terminal of our evacuation (Uzbekistan), my sister got fixed up in a job as a bookkeeper. She was very sociable, quickly began speaking Uzbek language, enjoyed esteem and love of local residents. One day an Uzbek made a strange request: he asked her to let our younger brother Isaac go with him. He was engaged in supplying activity, as our father did in Petrikov. He had to go from one distant mountain village to another, therefore he needed assistant. So my brother spent with him all the time we were in evacuation. We saw him only occasionally. He enjoyed his life, did not miss us very much, and made a lot of new friends. After evacuation my brother returned to Petrikov together with us, but soon he remained there alone: I left Petrikov for study, Sofiya got married and left for Bobruisk, and Daddy had already died by that time.

After a while Isaac moved to Sofiya (to Bobruisk), but it turned out to be uncomfortable for him. I suggested him to come to my place in Leningrad. He arrived and some time we lived together with him in our hostel, but he had no residence permit [14](#). Therefore he found a factory where they gave that sort of permit and a place in a hostel. It was a factory for processing leather. My brother finished secondary school without attending lectures, and entered Technical School for light industry employees. [Technical School in the USSR and a number of other countries was a special educational institution preparing specialists of middle level for various industrial and agricultural institutions, transport, communication, etc.] After the Technical School he graduated from the Textile College and worked at one of the Leningrad factories. In 1988 he left for Israel together with his son (his wife had died by that time).

During my childhood we were friends mainly with my elder brother. We were together all the time: at school, at home - everywhere.

### **During the war**

But now we'd better go back in June of 1941. My brother and I finished the 10th class. We felt like quite adult and important. Several days we spent walking around the town together with our former schoolmates talking about our future and making plans. On June 22, 1941 (Sunday) at noon I heard some noise in the street. We had no radio at home, but our neighbors heard Molotov's speech [15](#) and ran out of their houses. By the way, early in the morning on June 22 many citizens heard drone of airplanes and bursts of bombs, but everybody thought it was military exercise.

Next day we together with all our classmates went to the local military registration and enlistment office. [Military registration and enlistment offices in the USSR and in Russia are special institutions that implement call-up plans.] They enlisted almost every boy, except me: I was the youngest (only 17 years old). My brother Paltiel was among the called up boys.

I joined the Komsomol Battalion. Its task was to go round the neighboring villages and ask peasants, whether they noticed enemy spies. I was given a nearly blind horse and a rifle that dated back to the time of civil war. I did not manage to find a spy.

Day by day the front line approached our town. There appeared first victims: people occupied in building protective constructions around the town, were shot from planes.

Soon the town started preparing for evacuation. One of officials of high rank in our town was our relative: his surname was Zaretsky. He convinced Jews to evacuate. But my father refused flatly,

he told everybody that when he was in captivity during the World War I, the owner of the farm where he worked was very good to him. Many Jews of Petrikov also considered life under Germans to be much better in compare with Soviet regime. I guess that many Jews were saved thanks to the following circumstance: after occupation of Poland [on September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland] through our territory there passed many Jews forced to leave their native places. From their stories it became clear that times had changed completely and that Jews would not expect anything good in case of German occupation. Therefore many Jews of Petrikov started preparing for evacuation. My father had a good reason not to leave: he considered himself standing sentinel, because products from his food warehouse were delivered to neighboring woods for partisan groups.

On July 5 the first barge with evacuating people left (among them there were communist party workers with their families and plenty of luggage). Early in the morning on July 19 Zaretsky came to our house on horseback. He talked to my father in Yiddish:

- Velvl, leave immediately, save your children.
- I cannot do it, I keep the keys from warehouse.
- Give me the keys and make all ready for leaving. In half an hour I'll send a lorry to you.

So we moved to the station. There was a heated goods van, ready for departure. [A heated goods van was a freight car adapted for transportation of people.] That was the way I went by train for the first time in my life.

Later we got to know that about 400 Jews remained in our town. Later all of them were executed by shooting.

At first we arrived in a collective farm in Tambov area [16](#). There we (several families from Petrikov) started working in the field. Less than in a month it became clear that Germans approached quickly, therefore we decided to go farther to Uzbekistan. Our way was long and painful, but at last we found ourselves in Samarkand area, in some kishlak. [Kishlak is a rural settlement in Central Asia.]

My father started working as a shepherd, my sister got fixed in a job of a bookkeeper, and I already told you about my brother Isaac. As for me, I started working at the anti-malaria station. I was obliged to go round the local residents and distribute anti-malaria medicine. I was usually cheered by the following: 'Doctor is here!' I also had to spray oil over the surface of water reservoirs to destroy malarial gnat-worms. I guess I managed my task, because during my work there were almost no cases of malaria. The malicious irony of fate was hidden in the fact that when I already was at the front line (in 1943), my father got ill with malaria and died.

Once on my way a batman-rider found me and handed over a call-up paper from the local military registration and enlistment office. It happened in August 1942.

But I got to the front line not in a day. At first they sent me to Samarkand to take a course organized for inexperienced soldiers. After that course I was put down for allowances as a soldier of regiment ready to leave for the front line. But for some reason the regiment departure was postponed, therefore I was sent to Ashkhabad to School of Junior Leaders. A lot of junior commanding officers were lost at the very beginning of the war, therefore there was lack of that sort of officers. I finished that School and (as I had secondary education) was sent to the courses for commanders of middle level. I spent in Andizhan 3 months studying there. After that I waited



for appointment for several months and at last was detached for service at the Reserve officer regiment of the Western front. They informed me only about its staff location: it was in Tula. So I left for Tula. It happened in April 1943.

I do not remember why we made the first stop in Yasnaya Polyana. [Yasnaya Polyana is a homestead of Lev Tolstoy [17](#). In 1941 during 2 weeks it was occupied by fascists. They placed there a German military hospital. Fascists buried their dead soldiers near the tomb of Tolstoy. Crosses with swastika stroke our eyes.

In Tula I found the army headquarters not without difficulty. There I was told that I was appointed the commander of the rifle regiment #529 (army #50). So I had the only aim: to find that regiment in the fields of action. And I started having a haversack and a document which allowed me to get C. ration. From time to time I met fellow travelers, sometimes I saw local residents who were coming back to their liberated settlements. On the front road junctions I saw direction signs like Smirnov's Disposition or Artamonov's Disposition. That was the veiled way to name military units. I hardly found out that Artamonov's Disposition was the very place I needed. At last I got there after many days of wandering.

My platoon was located on the fringe of the forest. At that time operations were of local character. We had to suppress centers of resistance of retreating Germans. Thanks God, our losses were not bad. Soon we passed to the offensive, which was over by the end of September. Last fights which took place several kilometers away from the left coast of Dneper, were especially bloody. In my platoon there remained less than half of soldiers' number. In order to get prepared for the following fights, we stopped in the wood near the front line (near the River Pronya). It was interesting to watch the way people immediately rendered that forest habitable: there appeared tents, dugouts, earth-houses. These earth-houses saved many lives when the enemy airplane started bombing. No people were killed, but 4 horses were lost. Suddenly bombardment stopped for some reason. We went on living there, and lived even comfortably: besides field-kitchens we had a bath-house, a hairdresser's, a place for repair of uniforms. Soldiers watched films. But all the time we kept the army regulations strictly. I used to set a guard in the zone of our regiment. One evening I was walking from one post to another and heard a hail 'Stop! Who's coming?' I had no time to answer and heard the report of a gun. The bullet twanged in the air a centimeter away from my ear. Later the soldier confessed to be asleep at the switch. He awoke from dream and fired a shot automatically. We did not punish him.

Fresh forces were young people from liberated territories, who reached call-up age during the years of occupation. But sometimes we came across adult men: deserters and polizei soldiers. [During the Great Patriotic War people in occupied territories called a local resident serving in fascist police a polizei.]

Their fate was decided by special services.

They lacked boots for new soldiers, therefore some recruits joined the ranks wearing bast shoes. [Bast shoes are Russian country wicker footwear made of bark of young deciduous trees].

Meanwhile they set us the next task: to force a crossing over the river and attack enemy troops on the high opposite bank. They gave each soldier a new submachine gun and two reserve cartridge-drums.

One day before the dawn they gave us combat 100 g of vodka [this portion of vodka was usual for soldiers of the Soviet army before a fight]. Rockets Katyusha started their two-hour preparation fire. [Katyusha was informal name of the soviet rocket launcher mounted on a lorry. In 1941-1945 during the Great Patriotic War they played an important role in operations.] So the soldiers crossed the river and pinned down on the opposite steep bank.

On a signal the platoon went in to the attack. Fascists fired at us using all kinds of weapon: guns, mortars, machine guns. Suddenly a shell explode in front of me, I smelled burning and fell down. By that time our soldiers captured enemy's emplacement, but bombardment went on. After a while sanitary instructor found me and tried to take me away from the battlefield alone. I said 'It's useless, leave me here, call hospital attendants.' He answered 'I have no right to leave you here alone; I am obliged to take an officer to the hospital alive or dead.' Probably he meant the order, notorious as Not retreat a step. [In August 1942 Stalin signed an order #227 more known as Not retreat a step, which allowed commanders and special groups to shoot soldiers who retreated without an order. They considered injured people who remained on a battlefield to be retreating, too.]

But he did not manage to move me alone, therefore he hardly dragged me into the deep shell-hole nearby and threw branches over me. It happened early in the morning. It became already dark, when I heard a voice 'Comrade commander!' By that time I lost my voice and could not respond. After a while a sanitary instructor and 4 hospital attendants came across me and carried me to the hospital.

It is difficult to imagine hospital if you never saw it. It was a huge tent with operational tables standing very close to each other. At each of them surgeons struggled against death. They sawed off hands and legs, disinfected the intestines which dropped out of the abdominal cavity. Surgeons had no idea about day or night time. They spent all the time at the tables. In my body they found 9 shell splinters. They managed to extract only some of them, the others are still inside my body. They immediately made blood transfusion. Later in hospitals they made it several times more and each time they named the donor. My saviors were women from Vologda, Kostroma and other places of Russia - women exhausted by starvation and uncertainty about destinies of their relatives, who replaced their fighting husbands at workplaces. My gratitude to all of them!

So I had to stay in the front hospital for a month: I was non-transportable. Later I was moved to hospitals in Klimovichi, Tula, Kazan. In the Kazan hospital I spent 6 months. I'll never forget concern shown for injured men by medical personnel: from a nurse up to the chief medical officer.

While I was in evacuation, studied and was at war, I never came across any manifestations of anti-Semitism. But in hospitals sometimes I felt some anti-Semitic tinge. Injured people liked to tell funny stories about Jews, where Jews were shown in unfavorable light. Now I understand that they had no malicious intent, some of them probably knew nothing about Jews. But at that time it was very unpleasant to me, because I never came across something similar earlier.

In May 1943 I left the hospital walking on crutches and having a certificate of disabled soldier and 2 government awards: Order of the Great Patriotic War (I Class) [18](#) and a Medal for Military Merits [19](#).

I reached the kishlak in Samarkand area, where my sister lived. By that time my father was already dead. My sister (who worked as a bookkeeper from the beginning of the war) taught me

accounting. I got fixed in a job at the office which was engaged in purchase of grain, and worked there quite successfully. We lived in that kishlak in a very interesting premise: a long wattle and daub house divided into compartments. Formerly (when in Uzbekistan polygamy was authorized) each compartment was intended for one of the wives of the harem. So we lived in one of those compartments till the end of the war. When the war was finished, we decided to return home (to Petrikov). In August 1945 we started our trip.

### **After the war**

The town did not suffer severe destructions. Our house remained safe, but it was impossible to live in it: doorframes were taken out, floors were partly disassembled. We decided not to repair our house, but to sell it and to rent a smaller one: by that time our family was no more as large as it was before the war burst out. In the town there appeared Jewish families, but they were families which returned from evacuation. I already mentioned that fascists executed by shooting all Jews who remained in Petrikov. I started working as a bookkeeper. In the town there was a newspaper *Stalinskaya Pravda*. Rose Shusterman, a young lady and my schoolmate was an editor-in-chief. She helped me to become an employee at that newspaper. I worked in several places more as a part-time worker therefore I managed to earn for living.

In our town there were no anti-Semitic manifestations (neither before the war). Once I had to work as a teller before elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. I made speeches at different meetings and incited people to vote for the block of communists and at-large candidates (at that time they called it this way). My electoral district included an orthodox church. I went there and asked the priest to invite his parish to vote. He understood my request. Later he often visited me at home, especially when I was ill. In Petrikov people paid no attention to nationalities or religious traditions.

But I did not want to work as a bookkeeper all my life long. Therefore I decided to go to Leningrad to study. I wanted to study at the College for Cinema Engineers, but I got to know that they had no hostel for nonresident students. So I chose the Leningrad College for Fine Mechanics and Optics. [The Leningrad College for Fine Mechanics and Optics was founded in 1930.] I arrived in Leningrad and filed my documents. My certificate was full of excellent marks, therefore I was taken in without entrance examinations. I studied there for 6 years and showed interest in future profession. I had a lot of friends, but I never paid any attention to their nationality. So I cannot tell you, which of my friends was Russian and which one was Jewish. The same was during all my life. For example my close friend (we were friends since we were students of the 3rd course) was Russian. We made friends according to our interests: someone was at war (it was possible to talk to him about war); the other one was my fellow countryman, etc.

After graduating from the College they sent me [20](#) to Kharkov to work at the factory which belonged to sensitive areas of national defense: it had no name, but only a number - 201. [In the USSR numbered institutions worked on confidential, usually military subjects.] In 1950s in the USSR there appeared a new industry branch - rocket production (our factory was founded in connection with it). That sphere of knowledge was not only new, but also a priority one, therefore they invited only intelligent graduates. At first they suggested me to go to Komsomolsk-on-Amur, but I wanted to go to Kharkov: it seemed to me that I could find very interesting work there. The factory manager came to Leningrad himself to find young specialists. He looked through my documents

and agreed to take me. In total 10 graduates from our College were sent to that factory and 4 of them were Jewish.

At the factory I wanted to work at the design office, but they sent me to a workshop as a foreman. Today it is an open secret that our factory worked out and produced radio equipment for rockets (both ground, and on-board). We sent our production to Dnepropetrovsk, where they assembled rockets.

Here it is necessary to tell you that by the moment of my arrival to Kharkov I was already a married person. Among the students we associated with I met a girl whom I fell in love with at once. To my pleasure, she returned my love. She studied at the Pedagogical College named after Herten (department of Russian language and literature). We got married in Leningrad immediately after presentation of my degree work. Maiden name of my wife was Ginzburg, her name is Natalia Alexandrovna. She was born in Leningrad in 1929. During the 1st year after our marriage we lived separately: I left for Kharkov to work there, and my wife had to study at her last course. We visited each other on vacations. Later she graduated and moved to my place (to Kharkov). She worked at the Ukrainian school and had a good reputation.

In Kharkov they were obliged to put a room at my disposal, because I was a young specialist. Therefore I got a room in the two-room apartment (the other room was occupied by my young colleague and his young wife). We lived in harmony: no quarrels, no conflicts. I worked in Kharkov 4 years and decided to return to Leningrad, but it appeared to be not so simple. They told me that I worked at the defense industry enterprise and would go on working as long as they needed. The factory manager had a domineering disposition and was very competent. During the war he arranged work of evacuated factories in the Urals and was awarded honorary title of Hero of Socialist Labor. I held him in high respect and did not want to come into conflict. In the meantime in 1956 some changes were made in the labor legislation, and the procedure of dismissal became simpler. Here I'd like to tell you that I am pleased with the Kharkov period of my life: my work went well, I was valued according to it and people held me in respect.

We moved to Leningrad and settled down in the communal apartment [21](#) in my wife's room. By that time we were already a family of 3.

The only child of us was our son Alexander; he was born in Kharkov in 1955. He finished his high school having good marks. After school he entered the Leningrad College for Fine Mechanics and Optics. Since his childhood he was very sickly, and I know it from my own experience that a student of the Leningrad College for Fine Mechanics and Optics had to do everything in his power to manage. He had to fulfill strong requirements, study many difficult subjects, make plenty of drawings, etc. Therefore having finished the 1st course, my son decided that he would not be able to pass through exams and left the College. He started working as a draftsman (he had enough time to master it at the College) at the Army Medical College. [The Army Medical College was founded in 1798.] Later he trained for a new profession of repairman of medical equipment and entered Military Mechanical College. [Military Mechanical College in Leningrad was founded in 1875.] He graduated from it studying by correspondence. [Correspondence course allowed students to study and work simultaneously.] On graduating from the College he wanted to remain at the Army Medical College, but to work as an engineer. But they refused, and everybody understood that the reason was the so-called item 5 [22](#). Therefore he continued to work there

holding his previous post, which did not require to have higher education.

In 1990s he decided to change profession and entered Polygraphic Technical School, which he finished with excellent marks. [Technical schools appeared in the USSR to prepare employees of middle level for industrial, agricultural and other organizations.] Since then he works as a proof-reader at different publishing houses. He is a highly respectable worker: because of his engineering education he can make various scientific texts ready for publication. He is married, but unfortunately they have no children.

We did not bring our son up as a Jew. Certainly he knew that he was Jewish. You see, it is rather difficult to forget about it living in the Soviet Union. As soon as you do, they will remind you. Later I'll tell you how my son helped me in my Jewish affairs.

Having returned to Leningrad, I started working in one of institutions which belonged to sensitive areas of national defense (now it is named the Institute of Distant Radio Navigation). It was easy for me to find job, because of my previous working experience: a person from Kharkov special institution was welcomed everywhere in our sphere. I worked there 40 years up to my pension: I retired on pension in 1997, by that time I was 73 years old. There were no manifestations of anti-Semitism at our institute. You see, its director was a person who always took Jews into his institute. And in fact in the USSR there were times when it was not easy for a Jew to be employed. Once a personnel manager of our institute told the director that he was not able to take in a guy because of the item 5 [22](#). Director answered 'Well, then it is necessary for me to go to the local Party committee and let them explain me what item 5 means.' And that guy was immediately taken in, because in fact the instruction not to take Jews was secrete. As for me, I remember some insignificant troubles, but in comparison with the situation at other organizations it was trifle, not worth speaking about.

One day a large group of 150 persons were going to be presented with government awards for some successful work. Placing of awards was up to the institute administration. I was recommended for Order of Honor, but the local Communist Party committee did not approve it. As a result, I was awarded only a medal. And during the Six-Day-War [23](#) at one of our meetings they decided to hold up to shame Israeli aggressors. I stood up and said that it was not an aggression, but a preventive action of the country surrounded by hostile neighbors. Immediately I was called a nationalist, and they stopped inviting me to meetings for half a year. You may consider it strange that despite of all this I speak about absence of anti-Semitism in our institute. Be sure that in comparison with other Soviet institutions we (Jews) enjoyed an earthly paradise in our institute. I often made business trips. We often sailed by ships on the Baltic Sea and tested our equipment.

My wife worked at school, but she retired on pension much earlier than me: it happened in 1979, when she was 50 years old. You know that school teachers have the right to retire before the generally accepted pension age. [In the USSR and Russia women retire on pension at the age of 55.]

In summer we never went to the south. Our son was often sick, and doctors did not recommend us to change climate. We used to rent a room somewhere in Leningrad region and spent summer time there. My wife had long annual leave and spent there all summer together with our son, and I managed to be with them only during one month.

To tell the truth, when I became a pensioner I was bored for lack of an occupation. And I had a friend, a Jew. In contrast to me, he knew much about the Jewish life of our city: he visited Hesed Avraham Welfare Center [24](#) and the synagogue. He spent his free time working at the Nadezhda factory: a small factory at Hesed Center producing wheelchairs, crutches, canes and other things useful for elderly and disabled people. Understanding my low spirits, my friend brought me to that factory. I liked to be there and started working as a designer. I received no money for my work: we all were volunteers. I worked there about 7 years. I made business trips. It was interesting for me, because I made myself useful. But later everything changed there: they started doing business and I did not like it. They started paying workers, while when I came there for the first time, there worked only volunteers. It seemed to me, that after that something very important disappeared, the spirit of workers group changed and I did not want to work there any more.

As soon as I began working at the Nadezhda factory, I identified myself as a Jew. You understand of course that I am joking now: I never forgot about it, but before I knew nothing about the Jewish community of the city. In Hesed I got to know that at the synagogue there was a group for studying basis of Judaism. I went there and found it good. I have been studying there already for several years. We begin at 9 o'clock in the morning with a pray (chief rabbi is at the head of it). I like listening to rabbi singing, I like his pretty voice. Listening to him, I always recollect my father praying. After praying there come teachers from yeshvah. They tell us about the week's Torah portion, Jewish holidays, and history of our people. We study in homelike atmosphere: people argue, ask questions. Most of the group members are pensioners.

And earlier I visited synagogue very seldom, even not every year. We did not celebrate Jewish holidays, did not observe Tradition. But since 1980 we celebrate Seder at home. Our family is not large (we have no relatives), but we invite our friends and in total we gather about 20 persons. Natalia Alexandrovna prepares snacks, and I am responsible for spiritual part. We do not observe kashrut strictly, but we never eat neither pork, nor sausage.

About 8 years ago together with my friend Rem Altshuller we decided to found an organization devoted to memory of Holocaust victims and history of Jewish heroism. That was the opportunity for my son to render us invaluable assistance: he found for us interesting information in different libraries, spent many hours searching in the Internet. At first we wanted to organize our work at Hesed, but its director said no. Please don't ask me why: I do not understand it. Sephardi organization lodged us. Their rabbi Rabaev put a room at our disposal. There functions an exhibition and a library. Pupils of Jewish schools, Jewish businessmen often visit us, and they like our exhibition.

During all my life I had friends of different nationalities. It never came into my mind to choose friends according to nationality. Some of my friends married Russian girls, and their Russian wives became my friends. I don't know if it was possible for me to marry not a Jewess, but I chose my wife thinking not about her nationality - be sure! We have no relatives in Leningrad after departure of my brother.

Now I'd like to tell you what I think about the major events in our country and in the world. During the Doctors' Plot [25](#) I was in Kharkov. Moral environment was painful. People claimed that there were cases of assaults against doctors (fights and beatings). Heads of our institute started eliminating Jews from the Party and even discharging them.



When Stalin died, I considered it to be a disaster for Soviet people. I was afraid that all capitalist countries would attack the USSR and tear it to pieces. In the central square of Kharkov there was a meeting: people came on their own, nobody invited them. Almost everybody cried. And one of my colleagues came up to me and said 'Have you heard that Yossi has died?'

I can't explain it, but I paid no attention to the Hungarian events [26](#). First, we had just moved to Leningrad and I had enough to worry about. Second, I had no company to discuss it with, and from the Soviet newspapers it was difficult to understand something. And regarding throw of tanks to Czechoslovakia [27](#) I understood everything well: the USSR had no reason for that. By that time I already had friends and discussed the situation with them in details.

During the Israeli wars [23, 28] my sympathies were completely on the side of Israel.

I took the news about Perestroika with enthusiasm. We often listened to Radio Liberty [29](#) through the noise [in the USSR they used to jam western radio broadcasts by means of special devices], therefore we knew what happened in the world and understood the way war-lords were going. When Gorbachev appeared [30](#), I was glad that he was trying to break this dangerous tendency.

I already mentioned about my connections with the Jewish community of Petersburg. We receive food packages from Hesed Center for holidays. I never received any help from other organizations.

## **Glossary:**

### **[1](#) Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### **[2](#) Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

Struggle against religion: The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

### **[3](#) Spanish Civil War (1936-39)**

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales

and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

#### **4 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.

#### **5 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

#### **6 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.

#### **7 NKVD**

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

**8 KGB:** The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

**9 Struggle against religion:** The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

## **10 Young Octobrist**

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

## **11 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscoouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

## **12 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.

## **13 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'.

## **14 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.

## **15 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.

## **16 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.

## **17 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)**

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as *Sevastopol Sketches*, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

## **18 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

## **19 Medal for Military Merits**

awarded after 17th October 1938 to soldiers of the Soviet army, navy and frontier guard for their 'bravery in battles with the enemies of the Soviet Union' and 'defense of the immunity of the state borders' and 'struggle with diversionists, spies and other enemies of the people'.

## **20 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.

## **21 Communal apartment**

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 communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **22 Item 5**

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

**23** Six-Day-War: The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

**24** Hesed: Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

## **25 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.

## **26 1956**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started

in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

## **27 Prague Spring**

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

## **28 Yom Kippur War**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

## **29 Radio Liberty**

Radio Liberty, which started broadcasting in 1953, has served as a surrogate 'home service' to the lands of the former Soviet Union, providing news and information that was otherwise unavailable to most Soviet and post-Soviet citizens. During that time, the station weathered strong opposition from the Soviet Union and its allies, including constant jamming, public criticism, diplomatic protests, and even physical attacks on Radio Liberty buildings and personnel. In 1976, Radio Liberty was merged with Radio Free Europe (RFE) to form a single organization, RFE/RL, Inc.

## **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.