

# Dina Kuremaa

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I met Dina Kuremaa in the Jewish Community of Estonia [1](#), but the interview was conducted in the hotel, where I was staying. Dina is a slender, rather short woman. She is very feminine and charming. Dina's hair is curly, of auburn color.

She looks much younger than her age, perhaps because she smiles often. Dina likes jokes and laughter. She is very sociable and easy-going.

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## **Family background**

My father, Ezekiel Neimark, is from Poland. He was born in 1889 in a small town called Koden [170 km from Warsaw]. I know that my father's birthday was always marked in March. I know nothing about Father's family. All my father's kin remained in Poland and I never saw them. Father said that his family was very religious. They strictly observed traditions and lead a Jewish way of life. Father went to cheder. Besides, he obtained education in a Jewish elementary school. He finished four or five grades, I don't remember for sure. My father's mother tongue was Yiddish.

I don't know why Father decided to leave Poland and his family. He never mentioned it. At any rate, in 1918 he came to Estonia and settled in Tallinn. Here he met my mother. When Father became an Estonian citizen, they entered the name Kissel in his passport. His Jewish name Izekiel was written in the synagogue records. Father's name was also a little bit changed. It was written Naimark instead of Neimark.

Mother's family lived in Estonia, in a small town called Paljasmaa [about 80 km from Tallinn]. My maternal grandfather, Leizer-Ber Aizman, was born in Tartu. Grandmother's name was Ella. I don't know her maiden name. Grandmother was born in Paljasmaa and my grandparents moved there after the wedding. Grandmother was a housewife.

All their children were born in Paljasmaa. The family was large. They had 13 children. I knew only five out of them: Mother and four of her sisters. They lived in Estonia. The rest of the children lived in different parts of the world. Mother's elder sister Ida and younger brother left for America in the 1900s. Other siblings lived in Russia. I knew only Anna, who lived in Leningrad with her family. Mother's sister Reize, Roche and Fanny lived in Estonia. My mother Berta was one of the youngest

children in the family. She was born in 1892.

None of the children of the Aizman family obtained a good education. My mother finished three grades of Jewish elementary school. I think that another four children had approximately the same education. The family was religious. Jewish traditions were observed. Sabbath and Jewish holidays were marked at home. Grandfather went to the prayer house on Sabbath and on Jewish holidays. Yiddish was spoken at home.

Grandfather died in the 1910s. There was no Jewish cemetery in Paljasmaa, so he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tartu.

The children grew up and flew out of the nest in different directions. All of them had families. Anna married a certain Feitelson. They had one son. Reize married Mayzel. They had two sons, Ber and Abram, and three daughters: Zelda, Raya, and I don't remember their third daughter's name. Both Reize's sons immigrated to Palestine in the 1930s. Rebecca married a certain Dantsig. They had a son, Abram, and a daughter, Dina. Roche Strazh had two children: daughter Dina and son Abram. Fanny married Olei. They had only one child- son Bernchard. Having got married all of my mother's sisters became housewives.

When Mother grew up, she left Paljasmaa and moved to Tallinn to look for a job. Her married friend lived there and Mother moved in with her. Mother didn't have education, so she started working as a sales assistant in a kiosk on the market. She sold buttons, threads and all kinds of small paraphernalia for tailors. One day Father came by to get buttons. That was the way my parents met. Mother was a beautiful girl and Father had a crush on her. Mother was tall and buxom. Father was small and slim. They started seeing each other and in 1919 they got married. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a lot of guests. It was very mirthful. Mother often told us about it.

When my parents got married they rented an apartment. It was located on Kompasi Street. I don't remember that apartment. After their children were born, my parents moved to a more spacious apartment, consisting of five rooms. We lived there until evacuation. I remember that place very well. It was a two-storied log house. It is no longer there. A multi-storied building is in its place now. There were two apartments on each floor of our house. We lived on the first floor. Our neighbors were an Estonian family. The second floor was occupied by a Jewish family. My parents were friends with them. Each apartment consisted of four rooms, a kitchen and a poky room for the maids.

## Growing up

Our family was Jewish and all the children got Jewish names. My elder sister, Ente-Zelda, was born in 1920. She was called Zelda at home. The second sister, Chaya-Miriam, was born in 1921. She was called Miriam. The third sister, Roche-Leya, was just called Roche. She was born in 1924. I was born in 1927. I was called Libe-Dina. I was called Dina at home. In 1933 my brother Zelek-Michl was born. Father was happy to have a son. My brother went through his brit milah. I remember that event as we, children were treated to sweets.

Father had his own shop. He obtained a state patent for private entrepreneurs. His workshop produced half-finished patterns of the upper part of shoes. Shoemakers purchased those materials from Father. Mother was a housewife. My maternal grandmother moved into our place when my

parents got married. Grandfather had died a long time ago and she remained by herself. I remember Grandmother very well. She looked beautiful even at an elderly age.

We also had a maid, an Estonian lady called Anna. She was a very good lady. We loved her a lot. Anna mostly took care of children. She cooked hardly anything as Mother didn't let her do that. Mother cooked everything by herself. We only had kosher food, therefore Mother didn't trust the cooking of an Estonian lady. The only thing Anna did in the kitchen was cleaning or warming up dishes on Sabbath. Mother cooked everything on the eve of Sabbath, so the maid had to warm and serve the food.

The children were brought up in a strict way in the family. Of course, we were not chastised. Of course, sometimes when Mother was angry, she could spank someone, but Father's strictest punishment was to tell the disobedient one to stand in the corner. However, it did not happen often. Father never let us be frolicsome at the table and pick favorite dishes. There was a strict order: the whole family got together at the table. When Father finished eating, the meal was over for everybody and Mother started clearing the table. Nobody was allowed to stay at the table.

I remember one incident very vividly. I was not older than five. Father had stomach problems and he underwent surgery. That is why Mother always made oatmeal for breakfast. Not only Father ate it, but everybody else too. I didn't like it very much. I didn't even start eating my oat porridge as I couldn't make myself eat that. Father finished his food, left and Mother started clearing the table. I stayed hungry before lunch. At lunch I was given the oatmeal, which I hadn't eaten for breakfast. After that, I started eating everything Mother cooked. I think that this kind of upbringing was fruitful. All of us were raised to be unpretentious, conscientious and responsible.

We were not very wealthy. My parents didn't pamper us. I was the fourth daughter in the family, and I had to wear hand-me-downs after my sisters. I wasn't given new dresses and I felt very offended with that. My brother was the only boy in the family and they always bought him new clothes of course. They didn't buy any new pieces for me. I got new clothes only after the Great Patriotic War [2](#), when I started working.

My parents were very religious, especially Father. Mother was not as pious. Still, she strictly observed all Jewish traditions. Maybe she did so because of our father. Father said that one of his relatives in Poland was a rabbi. It seems that Father's whole family was religious. He was raised in a religious spirit since childhood. Kashrut was strictly observed at home. Mother had two sets of dishes: separate dishes for dairy products and for meat. Mother strictly followed that. Once, one of her children confused the dishes and Mother took the cinder from the stove and koshered the dishes with that. There was a shochet in Tallinn. Chicken purchased on the market was taken to the shochet. Once mother took me to the shochet. I still remember how frightened I was. When I saw blood, I was screaming so bad that I could hardly be cooled down.

There was a very beautiful synagogue in Tallinn [3](#). The Germans destroyed it during the war. Men were downstairs and women were on the balcony. Every year father paid for his seat in the synagogue as well as Mother's and Grandmother's seat. Seats were not to be bought for children as they sat next to the parents. My parents didn't always take us to the synagogue on Sabbath. The whole family went there during Jewish holidays. They even took my younger brother with them. There were a lot of Jews in Tallinn. The synagogue was very large and it was always full of people. There was a very good rabbi in Tallinn, Doctor Aba Gomer [4](#), and a wonderful chazzan,

Gourevich.

Mother didn't bake bread. She bought it. She always baked Sabbath challot, though. On Sabbath she always cooked gefilte fish and carrot tsimes. I remember we didn't really enjoy that as there was a lot of goose fat in it. Mother cooked all food beforehand. Her festive dishes were ready by sun- set. Mother lit candles and prayed over them. Then we sat down at the table. After dinner she didn't do any work about the house. Our maid Anna turned the light on, stoked the stove and washed up.

We observed Jewish holidays with all rules being observed. We bought matzah on Pesach. There wasn't a single slice of bread in the entire Paschal period. We ate matzah at that time. Mother had Paschal dishes, which were kept in the box in the kitchen cupboard for the whole year. It was taken out of the box only on Pesach, when everyday dishes were not used.

Father always carried out paschal seder. I vividly remember him in white attire sitting and reclining on pillows. All rules were observed. Father read from the Haggadah, hid the afikoman - a piece of matzah, which one of the children was supposed to steal and return to Father for redemption. A goblet with wine for the prophet Eliagu was put on the table. The door was kept open for Eliagu to come into the house and bless it.

On Yom Kippur my parents and elder sisters fasted. My brother and I were taken to our neighbors, a Jewish family, living on the second floor. They gave us something to eat. On Yom Kippur my parents spent the whole day in the synagogue and prayed until the vesper. They could have dinner in the evening when they came back from the synagogue. Father contributed money to the synagogue. The Jewish community collected money to help poor families.

My brother and I went to the Jewish kindergarten, though Mother didn't work. We had a maid, who took care of us. The matter is that Father wanted us to go to the Jewish lyceum [5](#) with teaching in Ivrit. There were two Jewish lyceums in one building. That building is currently occupied by the Jewish community of Estonia and the Tallinn Jewish school. All subjects were taught in Ivrit in one of the lyceums and in the other one - in Yiddish. When my elder sisters were studying in the Ivrit lyceum, most subjects were taught in Russian, and gradually the teaching was being switched to Ivrit. That is why there was no need for them to attend kindergarten where children were taught the rudiments of Ivrit.

By the time when I was supposed to go to school, they began teaching Ivrit since the first grade. My cousin Bernhard, the son of Mother's sister Fanny, was in one class with me. Yiddish was spoken in my kindergarten. At home we spoke Yiddish as well as Ivrit. We took walks, played games, had music, drawing and reading classes. I don't remember how much time we spent in the kindergarten. I don't think it was for the whole day. I think we stayed there until lunch and then went home.

I went to the first class of the Ivrit lyceum when I was seven. I cannot say that I was a very good student, maybe I was a mediocre one. I wasn't good at mathematics. Sometimes I got bad marks. Usually I got good marks and rarely excellent marks. From the 1st till the 6th grade I studied in the lyceum free of charge, and from the 7th grade my parents had to pay tuition.

My elder sisters Zelda and Miriam did not do very well at school. They finished the 6th grade. Father said if they could not study, they should work. He was not going to waste money on them. My eldest sister, Zelda, worked in Father's workshop. In accordance with his patent he could keep one worker and one apprentice. Thus Zelda became his apprentice and then a worker. My second sister, Miriam, worked at the spinnery until evacuation. A Jew was the owner of the factory. The third sister, Rocha, kept on studying in the lyceum.

When I went to lyceum, uniforms were introduced. The everyday uniform consisted of a navy blue dress with a white collar and cuffs and a navy blue cap with a white rim. There was also a festive uniform: a navy blue skirt and white blouse. We wore it on Jewish holidays and Estonian state holidays.

We studied two foreign languages at the lyceum - German and Russian. My father spoke broken Russian, Mother spoke no Russian. I spoke pretty good German, but Russian was hard for me. Many students in our lyceum were the members of children's Zionist organizations. There were three of them in Tallinn: Betar [6](#), Hashomer Hatzair [7](#) and Maccabi [8](#). My elder sisters were members of Maccabi. I didn't join any Zionist organization. I don't even remember why.

There was no anti-Semitism in Estonia. Neither I nor my kin felt anti-Semitism in every-day situations or on the state level. Estonian Jews exercised the same rights as Estonians and it was absolutely natural for us.

In 1936 my father, mother and elder sisters went to Poland to visit Father's relatives. My paternal grandmother wanted to see her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren, whom she had never seen before. She wanted to do that before she died. I and my younger brother weren't taken on the trip. We stayed with Grandmother and our maid Anna. I was so upset that I even cried on the day of their departure. My granny decided to distract me from that and took me and my brother to the photo studio. Such events took place rather rarely in our family, so soon I forgot about my worries.

My parents came back from Poland after a month. They told us about Father's family, the places they visited. I didn't listen to their talks as I must have envied the sisters. Thus, I cannot recall anything they told me about their trip. My grandmother Ella died shortly after they came back. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn according to the Jewish rite, the way it was supposed to.

Each summer Mother and we, the children, left town and went to Nõmme. She rented a house there for the entire summer. Many of our acquaintances were on recreation in Nõmme with their children. Grandmother, Anna and Father came in the evening after work and on the weekend. We lived in Nõmme in summer 1940, when Estonia became a Soviet Republic [see Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [9](#). Then I was told how Soviet troops entered Tallinn, but I didn't see that myself. I remember only how my mother unexpectedly packed our things and we left Tallinn in early August. I remember I was surprised to see very many militaries in uniforms unfamiliar to me, walking around on the streets of Tallinn.

When the Soviet regime came to power in Estonia, our life changed. Our Jewish lyceum was closed down and remade into a Jewish school with the teaching in Yiddish. All of us became pioneers [10](#). At that time I didn't quite understand what it was all about. I did what others did and became a pioneer like others. The new-comers from the Soviet Union were housed in the apartments of other

people, but it didn't happen with us, maybe they didn't have time for it.

My father's workshop was nationalized and turned into a cobblers' artel [11](#). Father transferred all equipment to the artel and kept on working there. Strange as it may be our family avoided deportation, carried out by the Soviet regime on 14th June 1941 [12](#). A lot of people who used to own stores and workshops were exiled to Siberia from Estonia within one day. Men were sent to the Gulag [13](#), and their families were exiled. Now I wonder how come our family was not touched. Maybe several stages of deportation were planned and the unleashed war was in the way of that process.

We got to know that Hitler's troops unleashed war in 1939, when fascists attacked Poland [14](#). At that time Father was corresponding with his relatives in Poland. They fled to Soviet Ukraine, when the German troops entered Poland. At that time fugitives were let in there. When they wrote to us from Ukraine, Father wanted them to come to us Tallinn. I don't know why they didn't come at once. Then the Germans captured Estonia, and we got evacuated. That was all we knew about Father's relatives. All of them must have perished.

Even when Hitler attacked Poland, there was no fear. The Soviet army crushed the German troops and we believed that Germany would not like to be at war with the Soviet Union. After Hitler's troops having been crushed, a non-aggression pact was signed between Germany and the USSR [the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact] [15](#). Everybody hoped that there would be peace when the agreement was signed. We were frightened when on 22nd June 1941 we found out from Molotov's speech [16](#) on the radio that German troops had attacked the Soviet Union, gone into action in Belarus and Ukraine.

## During the War

Father said at once that we had to leave Estonia as soon as possible. Mother always listened to Father, but still we didn't pack as quickly as we should have and we took the last train departing from Tallinn on 9th June 1941. Many people managed to get evacuated, but unfortunately many more Jews stayed in Estonia. After deportations just one week before the war, people feared Bolsheviks [17](#) more than Germans.

The only thing we knew was that we were heading somewhere far in Russia. Nobody told us about the final destination. As I mentioned we took the last train. It was necessary to cross the bridge over the Narva River in order to leave Estonia. German planes were constantly bombing that bridge. Hardly had we crossed the bridge, was it blown up. My cousin Dina Dantsig worked for the government, and they were evacuated in a ship, since there was no train communication. Their ship was hit by a German bomb, but the passengers were rescued from the sinking ship.

It was a long way to go, and finally we arrived in Kazan [about 900 km from Moscow], wherefrom some people were sent to Chelyabinsk, but our family stayed in Tataria. Kolkhoz people on carts met the evacuees at the train station in Kazan and took them to the kolkhozes [18](#). Nobody was left in Kazan. The militaries had the lists of evacuees and supervised the allocation. Our family was sent to the kolkhoz Shura, not far from Kazan. One more family of Estonian evacuees went with us.

We were taken to the kolkhoz and housed in a vacated house. There was one room and a kitchen. There was a large Russian stove [19](#) in the wall between the rooms. It was used for heating the

house and cooking. There was no furniture. The chairman of the kolkhoz sent a carpenter to us, who made big bunks along the wall for us. They gave us empty sacks. We put straw in there and used them as mattresses. Mother had brought along pillows and blankets for us. There weren't enough blankets for everybody, so one blanket was used for two people.

We had a hard living. The second family, which came with us, shortly after left Shura and moved to Kirov. Father was not willing to go. Our large family had no place to go. We thought that the war would end in half a year, or in a year in the worst case scenario, and we would be able to go back home. We didn't have many things with us. Mother took winter coats, underwear and a little bit of gold. When a baby was born in our family, Father always gave Mother some golden jewelry: a ring or ear-rings. That gold was of big help for us at the beginning of the war. Mother exchanged gold for products. Unfortunately, we ran out of the gold pieces pretty quickly.

We hardly had any clothes. We had winter coats, but we had neither hats nor boots. Mother exchanged some of the things for secondhand woolen kerchiefs and felt boots, valenki. They were worn out very quickly and we tied the soles that started to come off with ropes. We didn't have stockings, so we used rags instead. The winters were severe, about 40° ? below zero.

Father and my sisters worked in the kolkhoz. Sometimes I also was involved in weeding and mowing. We were not given food cards [20](#), but got some products for a day of work in the kolkhoz, namely flour and potatoes. After work, Father fixed shoes for local people and they paid him with flour and grain. Life was hard on us. We didn't even think of kashrut. During our stay in evacuation we had forgotten the taste of milk and meat.

The local people were Tartars, Muslims. They treated Father very well, but the rest of us were ignored. All of us starved, but it was the hardest for my father. He often couldn't eat anything, as he had problems with his stomach and he had to be on a special diet. The food we ate was not good for him. Father was getting weaker and in 1943 he died from emaciation. We wrapped his body in the tallit, taken by him into evacuation, and some sheet on top of that. There was no coffin.

Father was buried by local Tartars. They wanted everything done in accordance with their rite. We knew that it was customary for them to bury the deceased in a sitting position. Mother pled that Father should be buried in a lying position, but she could not control whether it would be done that way. My brother came back and said that Father was buried in a lying position. Then a board with Father's name was put on the mound. After the war we went there, intending to set up a monument for him, but could not find his grave.

It was even harder for us after Father's death. Local people cut us dead. Nobody cared whether we were alive or not, whether we had something to eat. When Father was alive, we ate almost every day. When he died, there were times when we had nothing to eat for several days. Then it became easier. We went to the forest, picked berries and roots, and mushrooms, growing on the trees. They were very hard, almost as hard as wood, so we could not just boil or fry them. We peeled those mushrooms, pestled them in a mortar and poured boiling water over that powder. Of course, we cooked all food without salt. We didn't see salt in the four years of our stay in evacuation.

My brother went to the kolkhoz field to pick up remaining frozen potatoes and brought them home. It was impossible to boil them as after heating they turned into mucus. We washed and baked them. It tasted awful, but we didn't pay attention to trifles like that. In any case, this food didn't last

very long. The chairman of the kolkhoz was very stringent. Once he nabbed my brother while he was digging potatoes. He called a militiaman and threatened that he would be imprisoned for stealing kolkhoz belongings. The militiaman turned out to be a kind man. He took my brother home and told Mother not to let him in the field. Then he started whispering some things in her ear. Later Mother said that he told her what to do: if going in the field, it should be only at the nighttime out of sight of the chairman. The chairman said if he caught my brother another time, he would sue him in court.

Of course, we were scared, but we had no other way out. My brother and I went in the field at night: he was digging and I was on the vigil. It was funky, but God was protecting us. We were not caught. We didn't have potatoes every day. We drank a lot of hot water every day to quench our starvation, which created the illusion of being sate for a while. All of us looked like skeletons. My mother was stout before the war. She weighed more than 90 kilos when we were leaving for evacuation. Her weight was 48 kilos when we came back. I don't know how we could possibly get over that starvation.

That was the way we lived for a while. Our neighbor, an elderly Tartar, had pity on us. She started stopping by at our place and bringing us food stealthily from her husband. Sometimes, she brought us potato peelings. Mother washed them thoroughly and cooked soup from them. My elder sisters Miriam and Rocha left Shura. Miriam went to Kazan, and found a job there as a spinner at the spinnery. Rocha left for Tambov. She was the only one, who finished school. She entered medical school and began studies to become a nurse.

The four of us stayed - Mother, Zelda, my brother and I. A funny story happened to us. We had playing cards, and sometimes we played at night. Once our neighbor saw cards in Zelda's hands and asked if my sister knew how to read cards. My sister was very witty and replied at once that she could. Of course, she didn't know how to read cards, but she knew all inhabitants of the village, whose relatives were in the lines, and who out of them was alive. She started spreading cards and telling what she knew. Local citizens took it at face value and starting coming to Zelda for her to read cards. My sister didn't take money. They paid her with food. Some of them brought bread, others flour. It helped us a lot to survive evacuation.

My cousin Dina Dantsig, who lived in Chelyabinsk, wrote that she would send an invitation for us to come there. I don't know what was in the way, but we didn't get the invitation.

I spoke broken Russian. I could hardly say simple things, so I didn't go to school. I managed to finish seven grades before evacuation, and I didn't study in the evacuation.

In 1942-43 the situation on the front was very tense, and it affected peoples' attitude to us. We were the only Jewish evacuees, the foreigners. Tartars were looking forward for Germans to come. I don't know what they expected from them, but they constantly were talking about it, and we felt ourselves ill at ease. When Soviet troops started attacking, the air was cleared. It was rather scary before that. There was a radio in the village, where we were constantly listening to round-ups from the front. We followed military actions of the Soviet army: where they attacked, and which cities they liberated. The closer Soviet troops were getting to Estonia, the more optimistic we were about the future.



We scraped through the dreadful year of 1944. In fall 1944 Estonia was liberated, and people started getting back home. We left for home in the middle of November. We were on the road for one month. We didn't have any food with us, and we had no things to exchange at the stations. One local woman gave me a loaf of bread at the station not far from the Estonian border. We cut it in tiny pieces and ate it on our way. When the train arrived in Narva, we were given food straight at the station. It was such an indescribable feast for us.

## After the War

We headed for Tallinn from Narva. Mother's sister Rocha and her daughter Dina were already there. Our apartment was occupied by strangers, so we stayed with Aunt Rocha. We came there on my birthday, and I got a pretzel made from rye flour for my birthday. Aunt baked it herself. It was so scrumptious! They boiled a large pot of potatoes for our arrival and we pounced on the food. Aunts Rocha and Dina looked at us with their eyes full of tears and told us to take our time and eat normally as nobody was going to take the food away from us. I still remember that.

Today, my daughter and granddaughter cannot get why my fridge is always filled up, and why I should always have bread. I am 79, and I have never thrown away a single slice of bread. If there is stale bread, I warm it up in the microwave and eat it. I cannot make myself throw away even a crust. I have kept that rule since evacuation. It is hard for young people to understand that, as they didn't go through that.

Almost all of our relatives survived the war and were in evacuation. Only Mother's sister Reize and her three daughters didn't manage to leave. When the Germans entered Estonia, all of them were taken to a concentration camp - I don't remember exactly where, either to Latvia or Lithuania - and were executed there. Mother's sister Anna, who had lived with her family in Leningrad, came to Tallinn after the war. She lost her husband and son during the siege of Leningrad [21](#). She wasn't willing to stay in Leningrad by herself and settled in Tallinn.

My brother Zelek-Michl survived all horrors of evacuation and died when we came back to Tallinn. We arrived in Tallinn on 15th January and my brother went to school almost right away. On 23rd February, Soviet Army Day [22](#), his class went to congratulate the veterans of the war. At that time we were living with my aunt, as our apartment had not been returned to us yet. He had to take a train to get to school from Aunt's house. The tram took a turn near school, and slowed down the speed. At that time, the doors to the tram could be opened by people, without the driver's help. My brother decided not to go until the stop, but jump from the tram on the turn to school. He jumped out and was hit by a car, which was moving alongside the tram. Zelek-Michl died at once. He perished on the spot. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn, not far from Grandmother's grave. It took all of us long to get over that tribulation.

We had stayed with Aunt Rocha for less than a year before moving to our apartment. We addressed all authorities and finally we were given two rooms out of our five-room apartment. The other three rooms were occupied by our neighbors. We had no idea about communal apartments [23](#). Even in evacuation we lived in a separate house, without neighbors. Only walls and a sofa were left from our apartment. That was it.

The parcels sent by American Jews after the war were very handy. All Jews, who returned from evacuation, were given such parcels with clothes, food concentrates and canned products. They

were of big help for a while. Gradually we started working, and getting things we needed.

Miriam was the first out of my sisters who got married. Her wedding was in August 1945. She married a Jew, Naum Shpolyanskiy, who came to Tallinn from Ukraine. Eldest sister Zelda married a Lett and moved to his place in Riga. Her married name was Putte. Rocha did not change her maiden name and remained Naimark.

I understood that it was not the right time for studies. I had to work as postwar times were hard. I went into evacuation at the age of 14 and came back when I was 18. I didn't grow up. I was tiny and lean and could easily wear the dresses that I used to put on when I was 14. My cousin Dina Dantsig worked for the Council of the Ministers of Estonia and helped me get a job there. On 25th January 1945 I was employed by the gas and water supply trust by Tallinn Ispolkom [24](#). In May 1945 I got my first salary and ordered my first dress from a milliner. It was a memorable event for me.

First I worked as an assistant to the secretary, then as an assistant to the accountant, then as a bookkeeper. I didn't work there for a long time, I changed my working place. I went to work for the Ministry of the State Planning. In 1952 I got an offer from the Russian Drama Theater in Tallinn. I worked there all my life: 48 years out of the 50 I was a chief accountant of the theater. Life got my easier when I started working. We received food cards right upon our return. When I got my first salary, we could afford some products from the market. We had enough to eat; we were not famished.

When I came to work for the theater, I already had experience in working as an accountant. I didn't have a specialized education, I learned on spot. People treated me very well, and tried helping me. The theater paid for my education and after work I attended classes at financial college. I studied there for about three years and obtained a diploma of an accountant, a professional secondary education.

Rocha had a diploma of a nurse. She worked for a hospital and entered the evening Pharmaceutical Department of Tallinn University. Rocha was the only one in the family, who got higher education. Upon graduation she went to work as a pharmacist, then she was the head of the pharmacy.

When campaigns against cosmopolitans [25](#) were held in the USSR, most Estonian citizens learned about them from papers. We didn't feel it. When I was working for the Ministry of State Planning, I didn't remember a single case, when a Jew was fired. There were other things happening in Estonia - recurrent exile of those, who managed to come back after deportation of 1941. In spite of the fact that those people came back on an absolutely legitimate ground, without being in hiding, they were arrested and exiled in the previous place. Of course, we were lucky, as the new leaders of Estonia were loyal to us. My sister Zelda, who was living in Latvia, said that there was tension there and sometimes she had to conceal that she was a Jew.

When the Doctors' Plot [26](#) commenced in January 1953, Estonian Jews also felt that. Every day there were radio programs, where people were told how Jewish doctors tried to poison Stalin, and we could feel that anti-Semitism was streamlined. We lived in fear. I knew that the management of the theater was given the task to make a list of Jews employees. There were a lot of Jews among the actors as well as among the employees of the theater. The chief producer was also a Jew. Such lists were definitely made in other institutions too. Our HR manager, Scherbatova, came to Estonia

from Russia. She got those lists ready. I think if Stalin had not died in March, all of us would have gone to Siberia. We were living in constant fear. We had stocks of tinned food, rusks in case NKVD [27](#) officers came to us to send us in exile. Thanks God, Stalin died and our stored up things were not needed.

There was turmoil in the theater, when we found out about Stalin's death. We found his bust and put it in the foyer. There were a lot of mirrors and all of them were to be covered with black cloth and flowers put next to each of them. The mourning in the theater lasted for about a week. I didn't take Stalin's death as a grief, on the contrary I felt alleviation - there was no more fear. Aboriginal inhabitants had a different reaction. I remember the HR manager, Scherbakova, was in tears beating her head against the wall and crying, 'How will we be living!' I didn't have thoughts like that. We lived without Stalin, and our life was good. It was not as easy during his reign. We were always scared, were afraid of stooges. There was no fear under the regime of Khrushchev [28](#), and then Brezhnev [29](#). We felt more liberty.

Anti-Semitism was displayed under the Soviet regime in Estonia. I never felt it at work. In general, I could feel that people didn't like Jews that much, but it was not coming from the local people, only from those, who arrived from the USSR. They got used to anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and passed that feeling on here. In fact, they felt themselves the hosts of Estonia. Of course, Estonian was not banned, but Russian was the state language and everything was in Russian, beginning from the documents and up to the street signs.

When Father died, we gradually started speaking Estonian, not Yiddish. Mother spoke Yiddish, and my sisters and I mostly spoke Estonian. Mother kept Jewish traditions. It was hard. There was no place to buy kosher food, we had to stand in a long line even to get ordinary food. There were times, when there was no place to buy matzah for Pesach and we baked it ourselves. Then the municipal authorities gave the community a small wooden house, which was turned into a synagogue or, more precisely, a prayer house. Matzah was sold there.

On Friday Mother always marked Sabbath in accordance with the tradition: lit candles and prayed over them. Mother was the only one who was able not to work on Saturday. At that time Saturday was an official working day and people had to go to work. We tried to mark Jewish holidays the best way we could. Mother loved cooking Jewish dishes and taught me how to cook them. Even now I often cook such dishes as gefilte fish, tsimes, salted beef tongue and others. My family likes them a lot. We always fasted on Yom Kippur. Almost every Sabbath, Mother went to the synagogue. All of us went there on Jewish holidays - my mother, sisters and I.

There wasn't such a tough struggle against religion [30](#) in Estonia, as it was in the Soviet Union. It was safe only for elderly people to go to the synagogue there. If it was found out that a working person went to the synagogue, he could be fired. Nothing like that happened here. All of us were working and were not afraid to go to the synagogue. I went there, even when I was a party member.

In two years, after I was assigned chief accountant of the theater I had to enter the Party. At that time the Central Committee of the Party of the Soviet Union demanded that people who had leading positions in the company join the Party. The management changed very often in the theater. Our political officer became the director of the theater. He called me and said that I had a choice - to join the Party or to resign. I wasn't willing to quit my job, so I joined the Party. It was a

mere formality for me and for the party bureau. I didn't even know the statutes of the Party. The political officer advised me to read today's paper in case someone would ask about global events. I did what he told me and became a party member. When perestroika [31](#) broke out, I left the Party.

We didn't mark Soviet holidays. They were just extra days-off for us. The only exception was New Year's Day, when the whole family came to Mother. This family reunion was a tradition. Of course, I had to attend demonstrations with other employees of the theater. It was obligatory in Soviet times. People got together in the morning with the posters and with the flags. We marched in lines along the street and went home after the demonstration. In the event we didn't attend the demonstration, we would be reprimanded or deprived of our bonus.

In the late 1940s Mother started working at the market. She bought some things and resold them on the market. When my sisters and I became independent and started making pretty good money, we didn't let our mother work as we could provide for her ourselves. First Mother and I lived together. When I got married, Mother moved to my elder sister Rocha. Our family was on good terms. Everybody helped Mother. My mother died in 1962. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

I got married in 1956. I met my future husband, Raymond Kuremaa, with the help of my neighbors, an Estonian family. Raymond was their relative. On 31st December 1945 he came to congratulate his relatives on New Year. He rang the bell, and I opened the door. He looked at me and asked who I was. I said that I had lived there since my arrival from evacuation. He introduced himself and said that he had come to see his relatives. Then my neighbor came up to me and said that Raymond wanted to congratulate me on New Year. That was the way we met. From time to time we saw each other, went for a walk, to the cinema. I had known Raymond for eleven years before we got married. We were just friends. If someone told me about our getting married, I would only laugh.

Raymond was born in a hamlet in Raplass district of Estonia in 1924. His parents owned a farm, cultivated land and bred cows. When Estonia became Soviet, all property of Raymond's parents was taken over by a kolkhoz. Raymond's elder brother, who was 18 in 1941, was in hiding in the forest, when the Germans came to Estonia - he was not willing to join the German army. Then he came home to his parents, and someone told on him to the NKVD. When they came to arrest him, they found a rifle in his house. He was sentenced to 25 years and nobody believed that he was fighting against Soviet troops, and he was given an additional five years for keeping a weapon. He spent almost ten years in the Gulag, somewhere in Kolyma [32](#). Only after Stalin's death, when the commission on retrial of the convicts' cases considered his case, he was released since there was no corpus delicti. He came back home in 1956 and attended our wedding.

Raymond wanted to become an actor. He came to Tallinn upon finishing school. He became a very good actor. When he finished drama school he worked in drama theater for a while. Then a puppet theater was founded in Tallinn. Raymond found it interesting to start working with the puppets and he went to work for the puppet theater. He worked there all his life. Raymond was considered to be one of the best actors in Estonia. He always took part in the festivals, in the contests. He won prizes.

In 1956 Raymond invited me to spend a vacation with him and go to his parents. There was a group of young people with him, so I didn't mind going. We came to the farmstead. There was a very beautiful forest nearby. We took a walk in the forest. In the evening we made a fire. That

evening Raymond proposed to me. I took it as a joke and said that I agreed. When we came back home, Raymond reminded me of taking our applications to the marriage register.

My mother wasn't against our wedding. During the Soviet regime, she changed her outlook, and didn't take the marriage with a non-Jew as tolerantly as it was in prewar times. On 19th August 1956 we submitted our applications in the marriage register and on 8th September we got our marriage registered. We had a very modest wedding party, only for the closest relatives.

Raymond was a very good husband. I've never heard a bad word spoken by him. He respected my observance of the Jewish traditions. On Jewish holidays we always came to my mother for celebration. Our daughter Ruth was born in 1958. When my husband and I were trying to choose her name, we wanted it to be both Jewish and Estonian. Raymond loved our daughter very much and paid a lot of attention to her. Of course, Ruth knew that she was half-Jewish. I never concealed that from her.

Our daughter was raised Estonian. She went to an Estonian school and spoke Estonian. Having finished school Ruth was willing to enter the Polytechnic University, but she didn't get the right score. Then she entered the Tallinn College of Municipal Economy. She did well and finished college with a distinction. She couldn't find a job in her specialty and came to work for the Russian drama theater. She worked there for 25 years. First she was an assistant to the decorator, then she started working as a supplier.

At that time directors constantly changed. I had worked there for 48 years, and there were 12 directors within this period of time. A new director cut the position of a supplier. Every department got the money to get necessary things and then submitted expense reports. The former director of our theater was the director of the Russian cultural center at that time and he offered a job to Ruth. She is currently working there as director of the administrative department. She is loved and valued there. She has a pretty good salary. She is happy with her job.

Ruth's first husband Unts Pegel was an artist. He was much older than Ruth. Their daughter Pirit was born in 1980. When Pirit was four, Ruth and Unts divorced. Ruth got married for the second time. Her second husband, Ronal Ruuk, raised Pirit like his own daughter. Ronald is also much older than Ruth. He was born in Tallinn in 1939. Ruth and Ronald have been together for 21 years and they are very happy. I think my son-in-law is wonderful. Ronald is working in the advertisement business. He is a very smart and capable person.

Starting in the 1970s many Jews left Estonia for Israel. I wasn't going to immigrate, partly because of my husband, but mostly because of my being conservative. It turned out so that I had lived in one street all life long and had worked in one place almost all life long. It is hard for me to imagine that I could change not only the apartment, but the city and the country. Many of my friends left. I was very worried about them and wrote letters. I would definitely like to visit Israel, to see this wonderful country and meet people I love. It would probably remain my dream. I cannot leave for places too far away and change climate because of my health. In 2002 my nephew Charvy, the son of my sister Rocha, left for Israel. He likes it very much. Charvy calls me every month and invites me to come over for a visit.

First I didn't take perestroika seriously. Then I felt how much easier it was for me to live. Maybe it was harder on me from a materialistic point of view, but I felt free. It was officially allowed to go

abroad, correspond with people from different countries, to say unfalteringly what you wish in any company. We had feared that for years. We were afraid to tell a joke, speak our minds on the articles we read on events. We have dreaded that since 1940 and it seems to me that we got so used to that we didn't even notice that we were deprived of liberty.

Estonia was revived during Gorbachev [33](#). Jewish life flourished. Our Jewish community of Estonia was founded when he was at power. I think perestroika has brought a lot of positive into our lives. I don't regret the breakup of the Soviet Union and Estonia becoming independent. Frankly speaking, I didn't have a bad life during the Soviet regime. I was lucky to have a good job and team, to have money, have enough to eat, friends - in a word - there was nothing I lacked. I have lived 50 out of my 79 years in Soviet times and I am really used to all conventionalisms and restrictions that I could not even picture that it might be different. I was just used to this life. Estonia regained its independence in 1991 [34](#). It's a pity it has not happened earlier. I had a happy childhood in independent Estonia, and I am happy that I spend my old years in a free country.

Our Jewish community got stronger during the years of independence. During the Soviet times they didn't let us forget that we were Jews - anti- Semitists were constantly reminding us of that. But still they tried to squeeze out Jewry from us. Now I feel myself a Jew owing to our community.

My husband died in 1993. He had renal cancer. He was operated on, but he died shortly after that, when all his diseases were acute. I felt very lonely after he died. The community filled that void and gave me a chance to communicate with people. The Jewish community treats old people very well and takes good care of us. The needy are given lunches, products free of charge. Some people get partially reimbursed for their utilities and heating payment.

I get enough to get by with my pension. The government classified those who were in evacuation in the category of the repressed. Now I am getting an additional amount of money to my pension. In spite of the fact that our utilities are very expensive I have enough money to buy anything I need. I am even helping my granddaughter. The Jewish school is open again for the first time in postwar Tallinn. It is a pity that my granddaughter is grown- up. I would have talked my daughter into having her daughter study there.

Our state takes care of us. I get the necessary medicine at a discount. Ambulance is free. We just have to pay to see specialized doctors. Now we have benefits and the state pays our medical insurance. We have to pay private doctors though. Recently I was operated on a knee joint in a private clinic. My daughter didn't want me to go home. I live by myself. My daughter is very good, but I want to be independent. My daughter and son-in- law help me a lot. When I couldn't walk for a month after operation, I lived with my daughter. My son-in-law looked after me. There are some sons who wouldn't take such care of their mothers. Now I am OK. My son-in-law doesn't let me carry heavy things. He buys anything I need and brings it to me. I gladly cook something for them. My daughter works for the whole day, but I have a lot of spare time. We are a very closely-knit family.

I don't mark Sabbath at home, but I obligatorily mark all Jewish holidays. My daughter and her husband come to see me on holidays. On Pesach I don't keep bread, only matzah. I fast on Yom Kippur. I started fasting after the war. Now my daughter is trying to convince me not to fast. I have to take pills all the time. I don't think there will be too much trouble if I miss one day. I have to do it stealthily for my daughter not to scold me. I attend the celebrations of all holidays in the

community. I was there on Pesach and on Sukkot. It is so good that we have a synagogue and a rabbi. I go to the synagogue twice a year - on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur.

The Estonian government treats our community fairly. Often the president of Estonia visits our community on Jewish holidays. He even came to the community on Chanukkah and lit the chanukkiyah. Every year we commemorate the Holocaust. We go to the memorial dedicated to the former concentration camp Klooga [35](#). The president of Estonia comes to Klooga on that day and holds a speech. On our state holiday - Independence Day on 24th February - the president of Estonia gives a reception and invites the chairman of the community, the rabbi and his wife. That holiday is broadcast on television.

When I hear, how Jews are treated lets say in Russia, I cannot even think of such things. Let God every Jew to have such a life like Estonian Jews have here in Estonia. Our community is a member of the council of the president, our opinion is counted. Our chairwoman of the community, Tsili Laud, takes credit for that. She does a great job. Now a new synagogue is being built in the yard of the community, Tsili also takes credit for that. I am trying to help the community the best way I can. I have been elected the chief` auditor for the third time, so I am a member of the audit commission.

My sisters Zelda and Rocha lived to see Estonia independent. They also were members of the community. Miriam died in 1979 at the age of 58. Rocha died in 1993 at the age of 69 and Zelda in 2001, when she turned 81. All of them were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. All Mother's sisters were buried there. It is very important for me to be buried in the Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish rite. My parents were Jewish, but to my regret, I didn't live like a Jew during the Soviet regime. I'm not very religious, but I am trying to stick to the traditions. I don't know how long I am to live, but I have my daughter's word that I will be buried in strict compliance with the Jewish rite.

## Glossary:

### **1 Jewish community of Estonia**

On 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, a resolution was made to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first independent Jewish cultural organization in the USSR to be officially registered by the Soviet authorities. In 1989 the first Ivrit courses started, although the study of Ivrit was equal to Zionist propaganda and considered to be anti-Soviet activity. Contacts with Jewish organizations of other countries were established. KJCE was part of the Peoples' Front of Estonia, struggling for an independent state. In December 1989 the first issue of the KJCE paper Kashachar (Dawn) was published in Estonian and Russian language. In 1991 the first radio program about Jewish culture and activities of KJCE, 'Sholem Aleichem,' was broadcast in Estonia. In 1991 the Jewish religious community and KJCE had a joined meeting, where it was decided to found the Jewish Community of Estonia.

### **2 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.

### **3 Tallinn Synagogue**

Built in 1883 and designed by architect Nikolai Tamm; burnt down completely in 1944.

### **4 Aba Gomer (?-1941)**

Born in Belostok, Poland, and graduated from the Department of Philosophy of Bonn University. He lived in Tallinn from 1927 and was the chief rabbi of Estonia. In 1941, he was determined not to go into Soviet back areas and remained on the German-occupied territory. He was killed by Nazis in the fall of 1941.

### **5 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium**

During the Soviet period, the building hosted Vocational School #1. In 1990, the school building was restored to the Jewish community of Estonia; it is now home to the Tallinn Jewish School.

### **6 Betar**

Brith Trumpedor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpedor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpedor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

### **7 Hashomer Hatzair ('The Young Watchman')**

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.



## **8 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

## **9 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)**

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

## **10 All-Union pioneer organization**

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girls Scouts 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.

## **11 Artel**

A cooperative union of tradesmen or producers involving shares of overall profit and common liability.

## **12 Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)**

After the Soviet Union occupied the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in June 1940 as a part of establishing the Soviet system, mass deportation of the local population began. The victims of these were mainly but not exclusively those unwanted by the regime: the local bourgeoisie and the previously politically active strata. Deportations to remote parts of the Soviet Union continued up until the death of Stalin. The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. Deportations were reintroduced after the Soviet Army recaptured the three countries from Nazi Germany in 1944. Partisan fights against the Soviet occupiers were going on all up to 1956, when the last squad was eliminated. Between June 1948 and January 1950, in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodged from

labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life' from Latvia 52,541, from Lithuania 118,599 and from Estonai 32,450 people were deported. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Lithuanian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable to reject the regime. Most of the exiled died in the foreign land. Besides, about 100,000 people were killed in action and in fusillade for being members of partisan squads and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

### **13 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

### **14 German Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

### **15 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

### **16 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.

## **17 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **18 Collective farm (in Russian 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.

## **19 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.

## **20 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers

never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **21 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

## **22 Soviet Army Day**

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

## **23 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.

## **24 Ispolkom**

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

## **25 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.'

## **26 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.

## **27 NKVD**

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

## **28 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **29 Brezhnev, Leonid, Ilyich (1906-82)**

Soviet leader. He joined the Communist Party in 1931 and rose steadily in its hierarchy, becoming a secretary of the party's central committee in 1952. In 1957, as protégé of Khrushchev, he became a member of the presidium (later politburo) of the central committee. He was chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, or titular head of state. Following Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, which Brezhnev helped to engineer, he was named first secretary of the Communist Party. Although sharing power with Kosygin, Brezhnev emerged as the chief figure in Soviet politics. In 1968, in support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine,' asserting that the USSR could intervene in the domestic affairs of any Soviet bloc nation if

communist rule was threatened. While maintaining a tight rein in Eastern Europe, he favored closer relations with the Western powers, and he helped bring about a détente with the United States. In 1977 he assumed the presidency of the USSR. Under Gorbachev, Brezhnev's regime was criticized for its corruption and failed economic policies.

### **30 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.

### **31 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.

### **32 Kolyma**

River in north-east Siberia; the Kolyma basin is best known for its Gulag camps and gold mining. Between 1922 and 1956 there were hundreds of camps along the banks of the river, where both criminals and political prisoners were transferred. They were mainly working in the gold mines, but there were other industrial plants built there too. Over 3 million people were taken to the Kolyma camps.

### **33 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.

### **34 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic**

According to the referendum conducted in the Baltic Republics in March 1991, 77.8 percent of participating Estonian residents supported the restoration of Estonian state independence. On 20th August 1991, at the time of the coup attempt in Moscow, the Estonian Republic's Supreme Council

issued the Decree of Estonian Independence. On 6th September 1991, the USSR's State Council recognized full independence of Estonia, and the country was accepted into the UN on 17th September 1991.

### **35 Klooga**

Subcamp of the Vaivara camp in Estonia, set up in 1943 and one of the largest camps in the country. Most of the prisoners came from the Vilnius ghetto; they worked under extreme conditions. There were 3,000 to 5,000 inmates kept in the Klooga camp. It was eliminated together with all of its inmates in spring 1944, before the advance by the Soviet army.