

# Simon Rapoport

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I met Simon Rapoport twice in the office of the Estonian Jewish community. The first time he came with his wife Ruth Refes. Simon is of short height. He is brisk, agile, sociable and witty. He willingly and humorously told me about his life. He is a good and observant story-teller. His wife, in spite of her age, still looks beautiful and youngish. They are a caring and wonderful couple. They have lived together for about 50 years and managed to preserve reciprocal love and respect.

There is hardly anything I know about my parents' families. My father, Iosif Rapoport, was born in a small Lithuanian town called Kedainei [about 100 km from Vilnius] in 1887. I don't know anything about my paternal grandparents. All I know about my father's family is that he had a brother, David, who immigrated to South Africa with his family either in 1928 or in 1929. They lived in Johannesburg. David had several children. I don't know their names. My parents corresponded with him before the outbreak of World War II. Then correspondence was disrupted. At that time we were citizens of the USSR [1](#), and the regime disapproved of those whose relatives were residing abroad, and even stronger disapproved of those who kept in touch with them [2](#). Thus, we didn't get in touch with that family any more. Father had a younger sister called Vera. She was single. When my parents got married she lived with them for a while. In the late 1930s she left for Riga. Vera perished when Latvia was occupied by Hitler's troops. She was shot by Germans just like many other Jews.

I don't know much about my father's childhood. As far as I know, he went to cheder. When he was a grown-up, he was rather knowledgeable about religious issues. I don't know if Father got a secular education. He was involved in timbering and did well. Unfortunately, my recollections about Father are scarce and fragmental: he died in Tallinn in 1930, when I was about five years old. I just remember his image. Father was buried in the Jewish cemetery of Tallinn in accordance with the Jewish rite.

A little more is known about my mother's family. I never met my maternal grandfather. I don't even know his name. My maternal grandmother, Doba Shlakhtman, had died two years before I was born. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. Grandmother was a housewife as most married Jewish women at that time. Mother's family lived in the Latvian town of Dvinsk. Before the Revolution of 1917 [3](#), Baltic countries were part of the Russian Empire. They gained independence after the breakup of the empire. Dvinsk was given a Latvian name, Daugavpils [Latvia, about 200 km from Riga]. It is still called that.

My mother Berta, Jewish Rohe-Braine, was born in Dvinsk in 1890. She was an only child in her religious family. Mother had some Jewish education. I don't know exactly which school she went to, but Mother knew how to read and write Yiddish and Ivrit. In the 1900s, my mother finished a

Russian lyceum. I don't know how my parents met. Maybe Mother told me the story, but I was a child and must have had other interests and don't remember her tales. Of course, my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. Back in that time Jews stuck to Jewish traditions, even if they were not too religious.

After getting married my parents lived in Riga for a while. Father did well. He owned a couple of houses in Riga. Soon they moved to Tallinn and father bought a house for our family. After the Revolution of 1917 Father's houses in Riga were sequestered. He was left with a house in Tallinn and a timber warehouse. Father bought boards and plywood and then sold them to the joiners.

When World War I was over, Estonia gained independence [4](#) in February 1918. That small country had to fight to be liberated from Russia [5](#). Jews also struggled for the independence of Estonia. Only in 1920 Soviet Russia recognized the independent Estonian Republic. Independent Estonia gave much to the Jews, who were living there. In general, Estonians were very tolerant to Jews. Even during the Tsarist regime there were no Jewish pogroms, which became customary on the territory of Russia and Ukraine [6](#). Jews gained even more rights when Estonia became independent. In 1919 the first session of Jewish communities of Estonia took place. A great many Jewish organizations were founded. In 1926 the Jewish Cultural Autonomy was established in Estonia [7](#). The board of the Jewish Cultural Autonomy played a significant role in management and enlightenment as well as in the cultural life of Estonian Jews.

There was no anti-Semitism during the 'Estonian era'- the period of 1918 to 1940, when Estonia was independent. There were two restrictions for the Jews - they were not permitted to attend higher military schools or be members of the government. As for the rest, all doors were open to Jews. As compared to the Jews in tsarist Russia, the overwhelming majority of who were craftsmen, Estonian Jews had an opportunity to obtain higher education, as there was no admission quota for the institutions of higher education in Estonia [8](#). There were a lot of Jews among the Estonian intelligentsia- doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

My elder sister Polina was born in 1912. Then my brother Samuel was born in 1917. I was the youngest, born in 1924. I was named Simon at birth.

My parents were not religious bigots, but Jewish traditions were observed at home. My parents observed the kashrut and marked Jewish holidays. Mother lit candles on Sabbath and prayed over the candles with the hands on her face. My parents went to the synagogue on holidays. We had kosher dishes - separately for meat and dairy food. Certain dishes were used only on Pesach and stored separately from the everyday ones. There was no bread on Pesach. We ate only matzah for the entire Paschal period. In general, all traditions were observed, but without any zealotry.

At home my parents spoke Russian between themselves. Russian was the state language before the First Estonian Republic was established. Thus, both of my parents were fluent in Russian. We, children, also had been speaking Russian since childhood. Before attending school, I was fluent in three languages - Russian, English and Estonian. I was taught English by my governess Mrs. Saiks. She had been in our house since I was a baby. First, she was a baby-sitter, then a governess. Mrs. Saiks spoke only English with me. When I started talking, I spoke two languages.

Mrs. Saiks and her husband were fugitives from Soviet Russia. Before the Revolution of 1917 they were the owners of gold mines in Siberia. After the revolution all of that was nationalized by the

Soviet regime and the Saiks spouses had to flee to Estonia, from where they hoped to escape to England. Her husband taught English in a lyceum and Mrs. Saiks became a governess. All my pre-school education is connected with her. As I mentioned before, my father died in 1930 and Mother, being on her own, took over father's business. She was constantly being busy and could not pay me enough attention. My governess mostly took care of my upbringing. Mrs. Saiks taught me to go in for sports. She gave me my first ball. When I went to school, Mrs. Saiks was hired by another family.

Many of our acquaintances considered timbering to be for me, but Mother was a brisk woman and eager to work. It was even harder for Mother as her Estonian was poor. She was from Latvia and was fluent in Latvian, not Estonian. The warehouse was not very big, but still she had to pay a lot of attention to it. Mother purchased the goods herself. She took trips overseas, viz. to France, Yugoslavia, Poland. Mother was a petite woman and all suppliers wondered how she managed to conduct a purely masculine business. Maybe it was the reason for their being sympathetic and giving her the goods in credit. We were pretty well-heeled owing to our mother.

The three of us went to the Jewish lyceum [9](#). The building of that lyceum is still there. At present the premises of the Estonian Jewish community are there. When the lyceum was founded, most of the children knew neither Ivrit, nor Yiddish, so the subjects were taught in Russian and Ivrit was one of the subjects. Gradually more subjects were taught in Yiddish. My elder sister Polina studied in that lyceum in the period when subjects were taught in Russian. When my brother Samuel was studying there, subjects were taught in Russian only at the elementary school.

When I entered the Jewish lyceum, Ivrit was taught from the first grade. I always had a propensity to languages and soon I was pretty good in Ivrit. It was not hard for me to study. The lyceum was secular and Jewish religion and traditions were taught like one of the subjects. Teaching was in Ivrit with the exception of military class, taught by the captain of the Estonian army, and gymnastics, also taught in Estonian. He had his own system of physical training. He made us work out. I am grateful to him for that. First, my results were miserable and I had the poorest score. Then I started working and training hard and became a pretty good athlete. I enjoyed being able to stand out. I found going in for sports very challenging and spent a lot of time on that. I was master of sports in wrestling and took the first prize at a competition in Tallinn. It was not a bad result. My rivals were strong Estonian guys. Maybe it was my good physical stamina which helped me survive later on.

When I turned 13 I had my bar mitzvah. I was prepared to that rite by the rabbi of the Tallinn synagogue. Things went on the way they were supposed to, but it was merely paying tribute to the Jewish traditions, as we were not very religious.

When I studied at the Jewish lyceum, I took an active part in the Zionist movement. I was a member of the youth Zionist organization Betar [10](#). Jabotinsky [11](#) was at the head of the organization of the leaders of the right Zionistic movement. Betar's ideology differed much from many Jewish organizations. Betar members were taught that Jews were supposed not to pay more attention to praying, which would not help in the foundation of the state, but to learning craftsmanship, tilling and military professions. Israel needed those people as it was to be formed and protected.

In summer 1939 Jabotinsky came to Tallinn. I remember his visit for another reason - I and other boys were assigned to guard Jabotinsky. Of course, security was too loud of a word for that - a 15-

year-old unarmed boy could hardly be named a security guard. We were supposed to stay by Jabotinsky's suite at the hotel and call for help if needed. When I was on duty Jabotinsky was leaving his suite and noticed me. He asked me in Ivrit who I was and shook my hand. I was present when Jabotinsky took the floor at the Tallinn philharmonic society. The hall was full. Everybody knew that Jabotinsky was a great speaker and were willing to listen to him. He asked the audience which language to speak: English, Russian, Yiddish or in Ivrit? Since the audience was variegated and people expressed different opinions, Jabotinsky decided to speak Russian. The lecture was held in good Russian. When the speech was over, he answered the questions of the audience. I remember somebody asked him the question whether there would be war. Jabotinsky said that there would be no war, as all were way too well armed and there would be a risk in unleashing a war. He was mistaken - after about two or three months Hitler's Germany attacked Poland [12](#).

Having finished lyceum my elder sister Polina got married to a Jew called Leib Shein, from the Estonian town of Valga, bordering on Latvia [250 km from Tallinn]. Leib was born in 1903. Of course, they had a traditional Jewish wedding. After getting married my sister and her husband moved to Valga. In 1936 their son Solomon was born. Leib was an entrepreneur and Polina was a housewife and raised her son.

When my brother finished lyceum, he started helping Mother about work. I finished nine grades of lyceum and instead of going to the 10th grade I entered Tallinn Technical College. It was the only college in Tallinn. There were three departments - electric, construction and mechanic. I entered the mechanic department.

The invasion of Poland by Hitler's troops, which was considered to be the beginning of World War II, was swiftly suppressed by Soviet troops. It was far from us and things were calm in Estonia. When Germany was defeated, the Molotov- Ribbentrop pact [13](#) was signed and in fall 1939 Soviet troops started entering Estonia [14](#). It was announced that Soviet military bases would be established in Estonia. The troops were peaceful, thus there was no resistance from the Estonian army. I remember I was struck that Soviet soldiers were so poorly dressed. Boots and coats were of very bad quality. I remember a Soviet officer standing by the best hotel in Tallinn, the Golden Lion. It was a typical weather for Tallinn - it was sleeting, and he was standing in the puddle in 'valenki' [warm Russian felt boots]. I was so surprised that I remembered it. In general, Soviet militaries were very peaceful and we didn't pay that much attention to them.

Then a lot of Soviet movies were screened. Of course, most of them were more or less propaganda but we were surprised that we didn't manage to get the message of the picture. People left the movie houses and were at a loss. I remember one of those movies. I don't remember its name, but the plot was as follows: the director or a chief engineer of a power station was trying to blast the power station for the entire time of the movie. The picture ended with the scene that the director was arrested and the first secretary of the regional party committee congratulated the head of the NKVD [15](#) on the divulgement of the enemies of the Motherland. It was totally unclear for us. At that time we didn't know anything about the repressions in the USSR [16](#) and didn't even suspect the existence of 'peoples' enemies' [17](#). Then there were rumors on the things happening in the USSR, but they seemed savage and implausible to us. People barely believed in them. Apart from the movies, a lot of Soviet newspapers and magazines appeared. I enjoyed reading educational and technical Soviet journals.

In 1940 I finished the 1st course of the college and was supposed to go through training at the machine building plant Franz Krul. It was a very old plant of a diversified production range - small locomotives for the narrow-gauge railroad between Tallinn and Tartu, cast-iron products, consumer goods and boilers. When I came to the plant for the first time I had to find the person in charge of the workshop. I asked the worker, who was sweeping the floor, where to find him. The person who did odd jobs was a local Russian, a good-looking, jovial, pleasant guy. Then I had to meet that person, Vasilij Vasiliev, but on other terms.

On 17th June 1940 it was declared that Soviet troops would be entering Estonia. The government of Estonia, led by President Konstantin Pyats, was dissolved and a new government, steered by Estonian communists came in place. The army was disarmed. All parties, but the Communist Party, which used to be underground during the period of the Estonian republic, were banned. Then the parliament was dissolved and new elections were coming. The first action taken by the parliament was - Estonia was declared Estonian Soviet Socialistic Republic and the parliament addressed the Government of the Soviet Union to include Estonia in the USSR. Thus, on 6th August 1940 Estonia became a part of the Soviet Union.

Many people came from the USSR. They needed lodging, so the space for the local people was reduced. Somebody came with their belongings and merely said that a room should be provided for him. People gave rooms for others to take. Before that time people in Estonia had no idea what a communal apartment meant [18](#), but when the Soviet regime was established that notion was introduced in our life as well as many other things. When Estonia became Soviet, my sister Polina and her family moved in with us. They settled in our house. That is why we didn't have to accommodate anybody else.

Soon the Soviet regime started nationalization. Mass arrests of Estonian citizens and deportations commenced [19](#). We knew about it, but we were thinking that it wouldn't refer to us, since my mother and brother worked by themselves and didn't hire any people. Mother's timbering warehouse was also nationalized. The authorities assigned a commissar for each nationalized target. He was supposed to take over the entrepot from the former owners and supervise the work of the enterprise. I was so astounded when the commissar assigned to our warehouse was that worker Vasiliev, who had been sweeping the floor and done other odd jobs at the plant Frantz Krul. He definitely knew nothing about economy or about timbering, but he was a kind guy and we got along pretty well. We understood that for the Soviet regime being competent was not the most important thing. It really mattered to come from the poor stratum of society. Mother and brother kept on working in the warehouse. They were not the owners, but employed. I turned 17 in June 1941. I was a grown-up; entered the college and went in for sport.

Somebody rang at the door early in the morning on 14th June. My mother and brother were off to work and I was by myself. People were standing on the steps: An NKVD officer wearing a cap with a blue stripe on the top, two soldiers with rifles and two pallid and frightened witnesses -Estonians. The officer didn't ask for permission to come in, he just pushed me aside and entered the room. The only thing he asked - who was in. I said that I was by myself and that my mother and brother were at work. He told me to call them. I gave mother a call and soon she and my brother came over. Then the NKVD officer informed us that we would be exiled to the remote region of the Soviet Union. Mother asked on what grounds, but no explanation was coming, they just said that it was the resolution of the Supreme Council of the USSR and that we had two hours to pack our things.

Later, when we were in exile we found out that there was no resolution. It was an oral order of Beriya [20](#) regarding deportation of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians [21](#).

We were permitted to take 20kg of luggage either per family or per person. We were at a loss without knowing what to do first and which things to take with us. Fortunately, my sister and her husband came over and helped us pack. The NKVD officers whispered to us that we could take more things as nobody would be weighing our luggage and added that we would need warm things. Then we understood that he was a decent man. Many NKVD officers merely plundered the exiled, ordering them to take out money and precious things and put them on the table. Then they misappropriated them. The apartments were confiscated and then everything that new host took an interest in was loaded in the trucks. Luckily, we didn't come across that.

A large truck was waiting for us in the yard. There was an elderly couple with their belongings. We got in the car. We were driven to the harbor. There were railway lines for unloading the ships and there were six trains consisting of 50 cars each on every line. The trucks with the arrested families came from all parts of the town. The families were separated: men were put in one car and women with children in another. Then it turned out that the cars with men headed to the Gulag camps [22](#), and the ones with women into exile. Eighty percent of the arrested were women and children. 10,000 people were exiled from Estonia on that day, 14th June 1941.

We stayed at the harbor for 24 hours. People were told to get on the cattle cars and then they weren't allowed to leave them. There were no toilets in the cars. There was a hole in the floor. There were double-tiered bunks along the walls of the cars and that was it. We were not fed on our way. We were eating the food we managed to take from home.

My sister Polina and her husband were not exiled with us. Then we found out that the communists had preliminary compiled the lists of the exiled and they were not included in the list of the people to be exiled from Tallinn. If Polina and Leib had stayed in Valga, they most likely would have been arrested. As it turned out later, exile might have rescued them. In a week, i.e. on 22nd June 1941 Germany attacked the USSR [23](#). When the Germans occupied Estonia, mass killings of Jews commenced. So, my sister Polina, her husband Leib Shein and their son Solomon, who was only five years old, perished.

Our train departed. We crossed the territory of the USSR, which we had never seen before, and we were astonished how poor that land looked: dilapidated and untidy houses, forsaken fields. I was taking it as an extraordinary trip. Now I understand that the adults were not as optimistic. In the early morning on 22nd June we arrived in the small town of Kotelnich, Kirov oblast [800 km from Moscow], two hours after the war between Germany and USSR was unleashed. We got off the cars and were told that they would be taken by militaries. The lines of young people, drafted into the army, were marching along the platform.

At the train station in Kotelnich we heard Molotov's speech [24](#) via loud- speaker. He informed people that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union. We were told to go to the town. Nobody accompanied us. We felt a brewing chaos and people getting out of control. There must have been no directions from Moscow and local party authorities were calling the shots. We were told to spend a night at the school. Nobody was awaiting us, so we just lay on the floor in the empty classrooms. Our things were left at the train station and guarded by the soldiers.



Next morning we were taken to the dock by the river Vyatka. We got on a barge and went down the river. At times the barge stopped by some village and some of the exiled were told to stay there. The rest remained on the barge and went further on. The barge our family took was the last to moor to the bank, near the settlement Malmyzh, Kirov oblast [1100 km from Moscow]. The distance from the dock to the settlement was 5 kilometers or so and we had to walk there with our belongings. We reached the settlement late at night. We stayed at the local school overnight, sleeping on the floor. Next morning we went to get registered at the local NKVD department. That was the way our exile started. It lasted for 17 years.

We, the exiled, were totally under the control of the NKVD and the NKVD commissar was our tsar, god and boss. Everything he said was a law for us. We were lucky that the local authorities in Malmyzh treated us fairly well. Then we got to know that the exiled that were on the train with us had different conditions of exile. There were places where people merely perished. For instance, there was a small settlement called Lebyazhie along the Vyatka River. I was told about it by an Estonian, who was in exile in Lebyazhie. He was one of the few who managed to survive there. All exiled in Lebyazhie were mobilized to the development of peat deposits. It was one of the severest and hardest works. They were supposed to dig heavy and dank peat in the marshes. They were constantly working in dampness and evaporations. Then they placed the peat in piles along the river bank so that it could dry. But this wasn't the most dreadful thing. Local NKVD officers took advantage of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the exiled were Estonians, who knew neither Russian nor Soviet laws, and stole all food cards [25](#), issued for the wretched exiled. The Estonians didn't know what to do and how to address the authorities. They managed to survive only for the sake of exchanging the things they brought for food. When there no things left, they died of hunger. There was a much more propitiating atmosphere in Malmyzh. The local NKVD treated the exiled rather loyally.

We were exiled and in accordance with the Soviet law all our civil rights were reserved for us within the ambit of the area of exile. There were no barracks, no security. We were entitled to work in any enterprise of the region and were allowed to choose a place to live, but only within a certain area. We had the right to leave the place of the exile. We rented one room in a private house, where my mother, brother and I lived. Local people had a good attitude towards us. There wasn't a single family in that area, where at least one member was arrested or exiled to Gulag without any obvious reason. That is why locals understood that it was most unlikely that we were guilty of anything. They felt no hatred towards us. At the very beginning though somebody from the NKVD spread rumors that we were exiled fascists. Then they got to know us and understood that we were no different from them.

There were a lot of people who during repressions were exiled from the USSR to that settlement. It was the elite, intelligentsia - the families of famous people, military, party and state leaders, scientists. They were shot, but their wives and children were exiled. There were a lot of people like that in Malmyzh. We got in touch with them. Our family had one advantage as compared to other exiled Estonians: we were fluent in Russian and we had an opportunity to communicate with local people and other exiled.

Mother wasn't forced to work, but my brother and I were aware that we should be looking for a job. First, both of us were mobilized for timbering works. We sawed trees. It didn't last long and then we were sent to Zagotzerno. Both of us loaded grain on the barges. We worked almost without breaks.

Trucks were driven to the docks and grain from the kolkhoz [26](#) was loaded on the barge. It was a very hard work. Each sack with grain weighed 32 - 50 kilos, and when the barge arrived to be loaded, we were running back and forth and carrying those sacks on our shoulders. We couldn't even stop for a respite. We worked almost round the clock. All of us were covered with dust, only eyes could be seen.

We were given food cards for bread, but the most important thing was that we could stash a little bit of grain and then boil in on the fire later on. Boiled rye was not the most delicious food, but we were full and that was the most important condition for all of us. But we had to eat something at home as well. Having such a physical load, we were supposed to eat well otherwise we would have died from exhaustion in two or three months. Before leaving home we started putting some grain in the pockets and took it home. The dock was guarded by armed security officers.

Once my brother and I were searched and they found grain in our pockets. In accordance with the Soviet law we were to be sentenced to ten years imprisonment or Gulag. Then the director of the commodity point, Solodyankin, made it look so that we were punished - he fired us. It was very merciful of him he didn't only save us from punishment, it was even more. When we were mobilized, we couldn't leave work voluntarily and he helped us leave. Then we understood that he was not risking less than we did.

Then we cut wood for the local distillery. The job was good as for each cubic meter of wood we were given a certain portion of spirit and vodka. It was the most secure 'currency' in Malmyzh. It was easy to swap vodka for food. We were paid skimpily for our work. We even were not encouraged to go to the cashier to get our wages, 100 rubles, but a loaf of bread on the market cost 200 rubles. Of course, it was pretty hard for us at first.

I remember my brother and I worked on the river Vyatka during winter. In summer we rafted. When it was very frosty, the rafts were covered by ice. We were sent to take those rafts out. We had to break the ice with spades and remove heavy logs covered by ice, saw them into 1-meter billets and then make firewood out of them. What a hectic work it was! We were not skilled at that time, but our physical stamina was very handy. Then we acquired skills and it was easier for us to work.

There were severe frosts in winter. I remember, once my brother and I were on our way to work, to the bank of Vyatka River. There was no wind and the smoke from chimneys was vertical. My brother and I were looking at each other and when the cheeks of either of us were getting white we started rubbing them with snow. We reached the bank and started working. Mostly Tartars worked with us and they were more used to such frosts than we were. On that day, nobody was on the bank and we didn't know why. In the evening a foreman came and measured firewood in cubic meters. When he saw us, he surprisingly asked where we were from. We said we were from Tallinn, Estonia. He asked where it was located and we facetiously replied: by the Northern Pole. He, a semi-literate man, believed us and said that he understood finally how we could work when the temperature was 50°C below zero, when nobody went to work. We had stayed almost the whole day by the bank. I think that men can outdo themselves.

When we were working on timbering, my brother and I went to the forest to cut wood. We met two boys-shepherds with a herd of cows on our way. In the morning they took all cows from the settlement, tended the herd and brought it back in the evening. The boys wanted to leave the job, but my brother and I thought that it would be a good job for us. We were exiled, so they didn't want



to give us that joy. Finally our job was given to a local crippled front-line soldier and we became the shepherds. There was an adage in Russia saying if the owners of the cows fed the shepherd well, the cows would give a lot of milk. So of course, each owner tried to feed us the best way possible. We had enough food. Besides, in the fall they promised to give us potatoes instead of money. Before that neither I nor my brother had seen cows at a close distance, but we learned quickly. In this case as in any other it is important to be bona fide and attentive.

The work of the shepherd was seasonal and it was over in the fall. I had odd jobs in the villages. I whetted saws and axes, blowtorched pans, did all kind of locksmith works. Peasants gave me products for my work. I left home Monday and came back on Saturday. I walked from one hamlet to another and hauled the sleighs with tools and products. Only now I understand how dangerous it was back in that time. I could have been killed and robbed of products and nobody would have even found a trace. Nobody would have come looking for me. My fate was protecting me.

In 1944 I was acquainted with most of the citizens and they treated me like their own. I was offered a job as accounting clerk in a motor and tractor crew. It was rather hard and unpleasant. Good thing about it was that I was paid two guaranteed trudoni [27](#) per day. I mean that I received two kilograms of grain per each working day. I worked there until 1946.

My brother was given a job at the local artel [28](#), where a lot of things were manufactured: starting from nails and up to food products. When I had spare time, I was helping brother. We even made ice-cream. One of the main ingredients was sugar, which was difficult to get by. We had to find a substitute. So, we made it from potato. It was possible to buy potatoes. We triturated it to get the starch. Then we boiled the starch with sulphuric acid and as a result we got good and tasty treacle. To get rid of the sour taste we added dry lime. Chalk, formed as a result of reaction, flocculated. We added milk, eggs and dye stuff to the treacle. So ice-cream was made that way. We baked waffles for the ice-cream ourselves. That business was not income-bearing as the population didn't have money to buy ice-cream.

Then we started making soap, even toilet soap. I can say that the soap we made was of much higher quality than the soap sold nowadays at the stores. It didn't look so nice, but it was good. We added a dye as people were used to colored toilet soap, but in fact it was absolutely clean and white. My brother and I started a lot of things. We even made yeast. Local people bought it from us and baked bread and rolls with it.

We found out that Estonia had been liberated. We even knew that in May 1945 the war was over. We understood that it would bring no changes in our lives and we were aware that we were exiled for good. We had to live under those conditions and tried to make our lives better. I was eager to study. I didn't get full education before we were sent into exile. I entered the 10th grade of the local school, but stayed there only for a day. I was a couple of years older than the rest of the students and I felt ill at ease. Besides, I forgot the syllabus and I felt awkward when the teacher asked me questions and I didn't know what to say. So I went back to work.

Then it turned out that my fate was protecting me. In spring the entire 10th grade was arrested. The guys listened to the broadcasting of Voice of America [29](#). What was bad in that? Though, all guys and girls were charged with the foundation of the counterrevolutionary White Guard [30](#) organization. The head of that organization was imputed to some old man living in exile, who barely survived in the Gulag. He used to be a soldier in the White Guard army. Of course, he had

nothing to do with those schoolchildren, but nobody was interested in the plausibility of the charges. All guys were sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag, and girls to ten years. I don't think anybody survived the camp. All that 'divulgement' was carried out by the commissar of the local NKVD, whose name was Schastlivtsev. He was conferred with a Red Star Order [31](#) for disposing a counterrevolutionary organization.

I cannot forget one appalling episode: the Gendels family from Tallinn was in exile in Malmyzh. The head of the family was the representative of the company 'Nokia' in Tallinn. The company produced rubber goods, and Gendel got from them rubber goods and condoms and sold them. He was charged with having connections with foreigners and even espionage and was sentenced to either 10 or 15 years in the camps. The investigator told him during interrogations: 'If you confess in things written here, we would send you to the camps, where you will most likely survive. If not, you would get the same sentence, but you would be brought into such a state that it would be most unlikely that you will remain alive there longer than a couple of months.' It was blatantly clear. He was sent to the Gulag, where he had stayed for five years. In 1946 his presence was certified. It meant that when a person was on the brink of death, he was released from the camp to die on the free side for the sake of improvement of the camp statistics. Thus, the lethal rate in the camps was within the allowable standards.

Gendel came to Malmyzh. His wife sold last things for him to regain his footing. He must have been very sturdy and he survived. The NKVD didn't let its victims go that easy though; Gendel was framed with the organization of a counterrevolutionary Estonian fascist plot. An almost insane woman called Lagoutkina lived in exile in Malmyzh. Her husband was the owner of the fabric store in Tallinn. After exile Lagoutkina ran amuck as a result of the things she had to go through. She had been wandering in the streets and told everybody who was willing to listen that she was a friend of the Queen of England and similar tosh. That poor woman was 'assigned' by Schastlivtsev as the leader of the plotters' headquarters. She willingly signed all papers she was asked to as it was flattering to her. Many people signed the papers with the charges understanding that they wouldn't be able to justify themselves, but Gendel was adamant and didn't confess. He was beaten during interrogations. He couldn't stand the torture, broke his eye- glasses and swallowed the glass. He was sent to the hospital and the interrogations resumed, but Gendel said he would die rather than sign a mendacious accusation.

When the investigators were after his wife. She refused slandering her husband and said if her husband had stood the interrogation, she would as well. The interrogators threatened the spouses that they would torture their child. Both of them couldn't bear the thought and signed all the papers, shoved by the interrogator. Gendel was sentenced to 15 years in Gulag, and Schastlivtsev was awarded with a Lenin's order [32](#) for divulgement of the plot against the Soviet regime.

I was worried for having neither education nor profession and I wanted to study somewhere at any cost. There were three-month driver's courses in the adjacent town Urzhum, where exiled also lived. I wrote an application to the commissar of the NKVD in Malmyzh asking for permission to take the courses, but I was refused. Then by chance I was offered a job as a foreman at the construction site. It was close to Malmyzh and I agreed. Of course, it was my adolescent zealotry - to assume work I had no idea of. In the end, the work was performed pretty well. There was an episode when the construction manager and some outsider official came to the site to check my work. I was very worried. It looked like the work was solid and of good quality. After that I was

known as a good builder and I was offered a job at the construction trust Vyapolyanles. It was a very high result for me, as I was almost illiterate and my education was only nine grades.

I understood that there was nothing for me to hope for and I decided to run away from exile. In late October 1946 I went to Kazan on foot, as I was afraid to get on the train in the vicinity of our settlement. I had to walk for 150 kilometers. On the holiday of 7th November [33](#) 1946 I bought a ticket for Kazan-Leningrad. I hoped that on holidays the documents wouldn't be checked on the train. Of course, I didn't have documents. I purchased the ticket for that day, hoping that there would be less suspicion. I was the only passenger in the compartment and maybe in the entire car.

I reached Leningrad, wherefrom I went to Tallinn. In Leningrad, at the market, I had bought a passport with a different name and I felt safe. I didn't stay in Tallinn for a long time. I was subject of an all-union search. It was pretty expensive. At that time a search cost 25,000 rubles. I was arrested in Tallinn on 9th May 1947. First I was incarcerated in Tallinn for two weeks. Then I was sent to Leningrad. I stayed in the receiving prison for a month while my fate was being decided on. Of course, I could have been imprisoned or sent to Gulag. I was saved by a formality. When we arrived in Malmyzh, everybody was to sign a paper stating that he would be obliged not to leave the area of exile. For some reason I wasn't given that paper to sign. Since my signature on the resolution on the area of exile was missing, I could not be charged with an escape from exile. It saved me. Such punctiliousness was strange in the environment of total arbitrariness reigning in the USSR. Owing to that I was supposed to come back to the area of exile.

Thus, my roaming on the way to Malmyzh started. It was a horrible time. I was to take the train to Sverdlovsk from Leningrad. People were given a ration depending on the durability of the trip. I got bread, but my cellmate told me to eat the ration before leaving otherwise it would be taken away from me in any case. The prisoners took the train to Sverdlovsk, but I did not reach the destination as I was told to get off the train in Kirov and was sent to prison. I was starving. I stayed for a month in Kirov prison. The prison warden didn't know what to do with me. There was no train to Malmyzh from there and they didn't want or couldn't send me there by ship.

After Kirov I was sent from one lock-up ward to another. In each of them I had to wait for them to collect a couple more people to send me to another prison by train. It took time. A scarce prison ration consisting of 400 grams of bread and half a liter of soup was ordered one day in advance. When I arrived at the next prison I remained hungry as the ration was not ordered for me. The morning after, when I was supposed to get my ration, I was to leave on the train with another group of prisoners, who were transferred to another prison. The story would repeat itself at the next prison: the ration was not ordered for me on the arrival date. Maybe because of that I ate very skimpily for a month. When I was in Tallinn I weighed 56 kg and I lost 8 kg within a month.

I was lice-ridden. The prisons were relatively clean, but the trains and lock-up wards were teeming with fleas and lice. There was famishing. A human being can get used to anything. I remember what happened to me in Urzhum prison. At 2 o'clock in the morning the door of the ward was unlocked and a turnkey pushed a scary-looking creature. It was an old man with a sack on his back. He was very ill-kept, with a tattered beard. When the door was locked, I asked him how old he was and he said that he was 100. The old man said that he was incarcerated because he killed his granddaughter who didn't give him food. I didn't believe him and considered him to be a dotard. I asked if he had some food with him. The old man said that he had bread that he made himself:

flour mixed with sawdust and dried herbs. He pulled a loaf of bread from the sack and divided it in two halves and gave me one half. At that time I paid attention to his hands, with a coat of filth. I was so hungry that I was not grouchy. Then I studied his hands closely and saw that they were really covered by clotted blood. I hungrily ate the bread and went to sleep. That bread, given to me by the bloody hands of a murderer, did taste good!

Finally I came to Malmyzh. Life went on. I was hired by the department of the capital construction trust Vyatpolyanles as an engineer, even without education. At that time people like me were called practical engineers. Working in construction I finished the 10th grade of evening secondary school. There was no institution for me to continue my education in the area of the exile and I couldn't leave that area either.

In 1948 persecution of Jews commenced in the USSR. It started with the campaign against cosmopolitans [34](#), and in January 1953 there was the Doctors' Plot' [35](#). We learned about that from newspapers. We were untouched for the reason that Subbotin, the first secretary of the regional party committee in our area, was a smart man. When the Doctors' Plot commenced the NKVD commissar asked whether the only Jewish doctor, who worked as a venerologist in the local hospital, should be fired. Subbotin replied diplomatically: 'Let us wait.' If there were a direct order from Moscow to fire all Jews, he would have to fulfill it. Since there were no directives like that, the Jew kept on working as a venerologist in the hospital until Stalin's death.

I worked as an engineer in the trust. I worked in good faith. One of my duties was reporting. I was to make sure that the management got timely reports on the executed work. At that time the work was peculiar. People officially had to work for 8 hours. People left work at around 8pm and came to work at 9am or so. The word 'worked' is kind of out of place here; we sometimes were just sitting and waiting. The manager of the trust was waiting for a call from the executive manager of the trust. The executive manager was awaiting a call from Moscow, from the central directorate. The head of the central directorate and his apparatus were waiting for a possible call from the minister. The minister thought that he might be called from the central committee and asked for the heads-up, and all members of the Central Committee were at work as they were afraid or expected that Stalin would ring or give them a call as everybody knew that the leader burned the midnight oil.

All data was put down meticulously for them to be at hand for people to have the impression that each director knew everything about every single nail. Those who didn't work in the evenings were considered to be bad workers. I made reports for my boss and all correspondence in connection with the department of the capital construction was via me. I had to consider it and decide what to do further on.

I remember the 5th of March 1953, the day of Stalin's death. We, the employees of the trust, got together for the mourning meeting in the assembly hall of the trust. A political officer started telling us about Stalin's life. Most of the workers at the trust suffered from Stalin's repressions: they were exiled or sent into exile after Gulag. I was astounded that many of them, the victims of Stalin's despotism, were crying during that meeting. The deputy director of the planning department, Koptjev, was sitting not far from me. He was a former Gulag prisoner but he was sobbing. We had to rejoice and laugh! Maybe the reasons for his crying were the futile years spent in the camp? Though, it might have been a sincere lamentation about Stalin.

It was much easier to work after Stalin's death. Of course, the exile was not cancelled, but there was less rigidity. Once there was a resolution of the central directorate to send eight people to Sverdlovsk Advanced Vocational Training Institute, where human resources for forest industry, construction department were trained. I wrote a letter to my boss asking to include me in the list of the trainees. He answered me very brusquely and told me to go back to my work.

A couple of months later there was an order to dissolve several institutions and enterprises, including my trust. We were informed of that at a general meeting. Right after the meeting was over I went to my boss and asked him to send me for studies as he would change a job place and wouldn't be responsible for that action. I got the assignment, but it had to be approved by a couple of authorities starting from the local NKVD department. I was supposed to get the final resolution in Moscow, in the ministry. Of course, I had no chances. I put everything at stake. To my surprise, things turned out the best possible way. Again God was helping me. The head of administration was on vacation, so my assignment was signed by his deputy, who used to work at our trust and treated me pretty well.

The next step was Moscow. In Kirov I got the permit for a trip to Moscow and went to the ministry. I was supposed to show my documents to the guard by the entrance. I only had a certificate from the NKVD stating that I was exiled. Of course, if the guard on duty had seen my certificate, he wouldn't have let me in. I didn't know what to do. Then I saw a man leaving the building. I had come across him at work. He used to carry out a check-up at our trust and he was satisfied with my work. He asked me how come I was in Moscow and I said that I had to have the assignment for study signed. He palpably was unaware that I was exiled, otherwise he would have been afraid to do me any favor as we, the exiled, were castaways and nobody would risk even to shake our hands. He took my application to the human resources department and asked them to include me in the list. Thus, I got the approval and went to Sverdlovsk to study. I passed the entrance exams and was enrolled for the first course. My mother and brother remained in Malmyzh.

I understood that I was on shaky ground. I tried not only to study well, but to take an active part in social work. I used to sing and to dance in an amateur group and sawed logs for the institute hostel. I was the first to take up any job that any other people were reluctant to do. In a word I strove to be useful. It helped me. Two guys from Malmyzh studied with me. We worked in construction together and they seemed to be my friends at the institute.

After a year they sent a letter to Moscow, where it was written that I was exiled and for some reason appeared at the institute, but it was the year of 1955 and previous restrictions were cancelled. The response from Moscow was as follows: 'It is up to the administration of the institute.' It was decided by the administration that I could stay. Within two years I was supposed to appear at the NKVD department for them to know that I had not escaped. I was very poor in that period of time. The scholarship was miserable. I had to donate blood to survive. Donors were given food and paid a little bit of money. Thus I was living on that: from one blood donation to another.

In 1956 I graduated from the institute. There was a resolution from the NKVD that the status of exiled was removed from the children of the exiled, who obtained vocational or higher education in the exile. The NKVD officer who registered me weekly said that he had sent a letter to Moscow, gave me a good recommendation and added that I would have my passport soon.



Neither before nor after Stalin's death did I have hopes to be released from exile. The amnesty was declared after Stalin's death, but it referred to neither political prisoners at Gulag nor exiled. Only criminals were pardoned. Our future seemed gloomy. Only after the Twentieth Party Congress [36](#), when Khrushchev's speech [37](#) on divulgement of Stalin's crimes appeared in the press [37](#) there was a glimpse of hope. I was liberated only owing to the afore-mentioned resolution of the NKVD.

Having defended diploma I got a common Soviet passport, without any restrictions. I was given a mandatory job assignment to the construction of Bratsk hydro electric station, to the administration of highways. The administration was responsible for timbering in the areas designated for flooding, and for delivery of the timber. I was supposed to be involved in that kind of work. Instead of that I without any permission left for Tallinn. Then after ten years they found me in Tallinn, but I did away with the fine.

Our apartment in Tallinn was occupied by new dwellers. Of course, nobody at that time would take any actions for the apartment to be returned to me, and I decided to leave it at that. First, I lived at my friend's place, then I rented a room. It was hard for me to find a job. I had two considerable disadvantages: I was a Jew, which meant a lot at that time, and I had been in exile. Thus I could not be trusted. Finally I was offered a job in a small construction and repair company. The director was from Belarus, who didn't know a single word of Estonian. He needed at least one foreman who would speak Estonian. I was employed owing to that.

Then I was hired by a large construction trust called Tallinnstroy. I was responsible for the construction of a residential house. The house was poorly designed and was to be constructed by different construction organizations which were included in the trust. I was the 13th foreman who worked on that site. The house was located on a broad street, where there was a large traffic flow of trucks and there was a tangible vibration of ground. In a week after I had started work I understood that something was wrong with that house. I found a significant obliquity of the walls. The upper panel was barely stable due to the skewing of the walls. I accepted the site in winter and understood that in spring, when the thawing began and the soil became soft, even the smallest shaking would be enough for the house to be ruined.

I called the polytechnic institute and requested a check-up commission. In a couple of days the commission was sent to the construction site. It was lead by the reinforced concrete expert, Professor Laur. When he superficially looked at the building, he said that in his opinion I was imminent with imprisonment and asked how long I had been working there. I said that I had worked for about a week and explained the situation to him. Then a detailed survey of the building was assigned and as a result it was found out that there were roughest violations during design and construction, not to mention the thousands of petty mistakes and flaws...

It was discussed that the house should be dismantled and started over again. When that issue was considered at the central committee of the Party in Estonia, it was decided that the house should be restored at any cost. Even military construction units were involved for that and the expenditures considerably exceeded the value of the house. I was transferred to the construction department as a team leader.

Then my career went swiftly up and before retirement I was the director of the department in spite of having two 'stigmas' - being a Jew and not a member of the Party. My boss was being constantly told in the regional and municipal party committee: 'Why are you keeping that Jew? He should be



fired!' But he didn't give up and stood up for me all time.

There were 32 construction departments in Estonia and our department had the worst performance ratios. When I became a chief engineer, it became the best in Estonia and was regularly awarded governmental prizes and orders. When I retired I couldn't stay at home. I worked in commerce for a year or two and then I was offered a job as a construction manager in one of the house-building organizations. I am still working there.

In 1965 I managed to enter the evening construction department at Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. I was lucky: the subjects were taught in Estonian at that department and the teachers were Estonians. There was no anti-Semitism. First, Estonians were not anti-Semites, unlike those who came from the USSR, and secondly, they understood that for the Soviet regime both Estonians and Jews were national minorities and suppressed people. That is why they were sympathetic to the Jews. I studied while working and in 1970 I obtained the diploma of a construction engineer.

I joined neither the Komsomol [38](#) nor the Communist Party. When I studied in Sverdlovsk nobody suggested that I should enter the Komsomol as I was exiled. When I worked in Tallinn, only once I was offered to join the Party. I didn't want that and said that I was not mature enough. They didn't make any further suggestions.

My mother and brother stayed in Malmyzh before the rehabilitation [39](#). They came back to Tallinn in 1958. They got an apartment and lived together. Then my brother married a Jewish girl from Belarus, Tsilya Tunkel, and moved to Riga with his wife. Mother lived by herself since then. She died in Tallinn in 1966. She was buried in accordance with the Jewish rite at the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn, next to Father. My brother and his wife lived in Riga. Samuel was also involved in construction. He worked for a small railroad construction company. They didn't have children. They had a very good life. They were caring spouses. We kept in touch. My brother died in Riga in 1974. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Riga.

I met my Ruth Refes at my friend's place. Ruth was born in Tallinn in 1920. Her father, Mark Polyak, was from Ukraine and her mother, Marta Polyak, nee Kaplan, was born in Tartu, Estonia. Ruth's parents were doctors. She had an elder sister called Valentina, born in 1918. Both sisters graduated from lyceums. In 1939 Ruth was married to a man from Tartu, a lawyer named Evgeniy Refes. Their son Arkadiy was born in 1940. When World War II was unleashed, Ruth, her child and parents were evacuated in Tataria [Tatarstan at present]. Her sister Valentina Klompus and her husband stayed in Estonia. Both of them perished. Ruth's husband was in the lines with the Estonian corps [40](#).

When the war was over the family came back to Tallinn. Ruth entered the Teachers' Training Institute in Tallinn, and graduated from the Foreign Languages Department. When she was teaching English at compulsory school, Ruth extramurally graduated from Leningrad Pedagogic Institute. She left school and started working as an English teacher at the Pedagogic Institute. Ruth is retired now, but she didn't give up her favorite work. She is tutoring at home. Her son lives in the USA. In spring 2005 we went there for a visit.

We got married in 1957. We didn't have a wedding party. We just had our marriage registered in the state marriage registration office and didn't have any celebration. At that time I just started working and practically had no money. We have lived together since that time. We are happy to

have found each other. In 2007 we are going to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary.

When I came back to Tallinn, neither I nor my mother and brother observed Jewish traditions. It was very difficult at that time. There was no synagogue in Tallinn [41](#). It burned down in 1944 after the town had been bombed. The rabbi of Tallinn, Aba Gomer [42](#), was shot by Germans during the occupation of Estonia. There were no kosher products. As a matter of fact it was hard to get any products. Besides, the Soviet regime took an ardent struggle against religion [43](#). It was better to conceal religiousness, especially for workers. Estonians were not against religion, but the newcomers, Soviet people, who were more and more overwhelming the country, were totally intolerant of any kind of religiousness, especially Jewish traditions.

Soviet holidays meant nothing to me and my wife. They were merely extra days off. It goes without saying that we marked them at work. At that time it was mandatory for all workers to attend festive demonstrations. If somebody skipped that without any serious reason, he was punished - bereft of the bonus or fired.

I learned about the foundation of the state of Israel [44](#) when I was in exile in 1948. It was a great joy for me. The dream of Jabotinsky and many other Zionists came true ... From the scraps of information in our mass media I found out about life in Israel. I was happy for their victories and was sympathetic to their adversities. It was dangerous in the USSR even to think of immigration to Israel, even mere thoughts could put you in the camp once and for all. In the 1970s, when immigration was allowed, I was an extramural student at the institute, had family and didn't think of departure.

Of course, I didn't totally give up that idea. In the early 1990s my wife and I went to Israel for the first time and I went to the recruitment agency of repatriates and asked whether I could count on a job in Israel. I was about 70 and the head of department sympathetically told me that I had no chance of finding a job in Israel. Thus, there was no reason for me to go. I had always worked hard and enjoyed it and I couldn't imagine myself loitering. I was deeply impressed by Israel. It is a wonderful country, founded by great people. Their children and grandchildren are now building and protecting Israel. I definitely regret that I couldn't go there at an age when I could have been useful to the country with my work and skills. But now it is too late to talk about it.

When Mikhail Gorbachev [45](#) declared a new course of the Party, perestroika [46](#), I honestly didn't expect anything good from that like from any other concoctions of the Soviet regime. Many people in Tallinn didn't trust that either. Everybody understood that if military force was removed, supporting the Soviet regime in its entirety, all that gigantic empire would collapse. At the beginning, a lot of liberties appeared. We were disaccustomed to freedom of speech, religion, press and lack of censorship. Then things were like before, but people felt the taste of freedom and didn't want to go back to the past. We understood that there was no more cruelty of the past years and we started hoping. It turned out so that when Gorbachev decided to found a normal state, not one based on fear and compulsion, that the empire burst like a bubble. I consider the breakup of the Soviet Union [in 1991] to be appropriate and right. That was the way all utopist regimes ended.

The newly gained independence of Estonia [47](#) was joyful for all of us. We became free. We can go anywhere we want to and do what we find appropriate. Our living became better. I think a lot had been done within a short period of time for a relatively small and not very rich state like Estonia. The state takes care of its citizens, taking into account the things people went through. I

understand very well that it was not easy for our state to accomplish that and I value it. The things our country is doing for us are great and magnanimous.

In contrast to the Soviet regime, when anti-Semitism was steadfast on the state level, there was no state anti-Semitism in independent Estonia. It has always been a loyal state. There has been social anti-Semitism and I think it will remain. Social anti-Semitism is deterrent only when the state facilitates it or tacitly accepts this homely phenomenon.

Before Estonia gained independence, in late 1988, the Jewish Community of Estonia [48](#) was founded. It was given the premises of the former Jewish lyceum, where I and my siblings went to. In spite of a small number of people, it is a very good and strong community. Each of us starts to make a possible constitution. My wife and I are interested in the things happening in our community.

Unfortunately, I don't do much for the community as I am working and it is time-consuming. I take my work very serious and try to be useful to people. I am appreciated at work and it is very flattering. The house-building organization, headed by me, owns a block of houses unprofessionally built by criminal convicts after the war. Of course, the quality of work is much to be deplored, and used construction materials are of low grade. You can only imagine how those houses looked like when I came to work there. It was hard to bring them in order. There was lack of finance - as the project was not state funded, but financed by the dwellers of that building. Gradually there appeared much more comfort in those houses. People understand and appreciate it.

I get the Jewish newspaper. [Editor's note: the paper of the Jewish community of Estonia 'Ha?ahhar' [Dawn], consists of 12 issues a year, published once a month with a circulation of 500 copies; it has been published since 1990 by the Jewish Community of Estonia in collaboration with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Community.] My wife and I take an interest in the paper and read it regularly. I go to the synagogue on Jewish holidays and recite the Kaddish on the commemoration days of my deceased relatives. There is a small synagogue on the second floor of our community office. The new building of the synagogue is being constructed. The community is doing a great job helping lonely, old and indigent people. Of course, dinner, feasts and product rations are very important for poor people, but the symbolic meaning of these events is of great importance as well. It is great, when you know that some people from your nation are taking care of you, making you feel that you are a part of that nation.

Glossary:

## **1 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.

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

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

## **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **4 First Estonian Republic**

Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918, they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918. 5 Estonian War of Liberation (1918-1920): The Estonian Republic fought on its own territory against Soviet Russia whose troops were advancing from the east. On Latvian territory the Estonian People's Army fought against the Baltic Landswehr's army formed of German volunteers. The War of Liberation ended by the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty on 2nd February 1920, when Soviet Russia recognized Estonia as an independent state.

## **6 Pogroms in Ukraine**

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

## **7 Jewish Cultural Autonomy**

Cultural autonomy, which was proclaimed in Estonia in 1926, allowing the Jewish community to promote national values (education, culture, religion).

## **8 Five percent quota**

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

## **9 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.

## **10 Betar**

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, 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.

## **11 Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940)**

Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

## **12 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.

## **13 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.

## **14 Estonia in 1939-1940**

On 24th September 1939, Moscow demanded that Estonia make available military bases for the Red Army units. On 16th June, Moscow issued an ultimatum insisting on the change of government and the right of occupation of Estonia. On 17th June, Estonia accepted the provisions and ceased to exist de facto, becoming Estonian Soviet Republic within the USSR.

## **15 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.

## **16 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.

## **17 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

## **18 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.

### **19 Soviet Deportation of Estonian Civilians**

June 14, 1941 - the first of mass deportations organized by the Soviet regime in Estonia. There were about 400 Jews among a total of 10,000 people who were deported or removed to reformatory camps.

### **20 Beriya, Lavrentiy Pavlovich (1899-1953)**

Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

### **21 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.

### **22 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.

### **23 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.

### **24 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.

### **25 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.

### **26 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.

### **27 Trudodni**

A measure of work used in Soviet collective farms until 1966. Working one day it was possible to earn from 0.5 up to 4 trudodni. In fall when the harvest was gathered the collective farm administration calculated the cost of 1 trudoden in money or food equivalent (based upon the profit).

### **28 Artel**

a cooperative union of tradesmen or producers involving shares of overall profit and common

liability.

### **29 Voice of America**

International broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Voice of America has been broadcasting since 1942, initially to Europe in various European languages from the US on short wave. During the cold war it grew increasingly popular in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe as an information source.

### **30 White Guards**

A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

### **31 Order of the Red Star**

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

### **32 Order of Lenin**

Established in 1930, the Order of Lenin is the highest Soviet award. It was awarded for outstanding services in the revolutionary movement, labor activity, defense of the Homeland, and strengthening peace between peoples. It has been awarded over 400,000 times.

### **33 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 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.

### **34 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'.

### **35 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.

### **36 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

### **37 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.

### **38 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.

### **39 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

### **40 Estonian Rifle Corps**

Military unit established in late 1941 as a part of the Soviet Army. The Corps was made up of two rifle divisions. Those signed up for the Estonian Corps by military enlistment offices were ethnic Estonians regardless of their residence within the Soviet Union as well as men of call-up age residing in Estonia before the Soviet occupation (1940). The Corps took part in the bloody battle of Velikiye Luki (December 1942 - January 1943), where it suffered great losses and was sent to the

back areas for re-formation and training. In the summer of 1944, the Corps took part in the liberation of Estonia and in March 1945 in the actions on Latvian territory. In 1946, the Corps was disbanded.

#### **41 Tallinn Synagogue**

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

#### **42 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.

#### **43 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.

#### **44 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

#### **45 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.

#### **46 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.

#### **47 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.

#### **48 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.