

# Samuel Birger

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Vilnius

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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I met Samuel Birger in Jewish community of Lithuania. He offered me driver's services for a reasonable price. I refused, but after having a talk with him I understood that I wanted to listen to his story. It was hard to talk him into that as Samuel was a practical man who was not willing to do anything which was not to his advantage. His wife, a very sociable and sweet woman, convinced him to have an interview. Samuel and Maya live in a five-storied building, constructed in the 1960s. They have a wonderful freshly remodeled apartment, which Samuel prides in. He is not a very educated man and it is hard to interview him. Samuel often feels confused and cannot answer simple questions. Nevertheless his story appeared to be very encompassing and characteristic of poor Lithuanian Jews. Maya was very helpful. She seemed to be even more knowledgeable about Samuel's relatives that he was.



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### My family background

My ancestors are from a small Lithuanian town Jonava, located about 20 kilometers away from Kaunas. Jonava was very small, consisting of several streets. The population of town was mostly Jewish (editor's note: in the 1930s there were about 10 thousand Jews in Jonava). They mostly lived in the downtown area. There were their shops as well- grocery stores, cobbler and tailor shops. There were great carpenters in Jonava. Jonava cabinet-makers was famous all over Lithuania. Jews owned a small furniture mill. There was a match production workshop, where waste materials from furniture were used. There was square Liberty in the heart of the town. There were two big two-storied stone synagogues by the square. Apart Jews there were also Russians, mostly Old Believers

1 who appeared in Jonava in the seventeenth century. Old believers lived in the suburbs. They mostly were farmers- tilled the land and bred cattle. They brought dairy products, potatoes and other vegetables in town. Poles and Lithuanians also lived in town, but there were not many of them.

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents were cabmen. My paternal grandfather Samuel Iosif Birger was born in Jonava in the 1870s. I did not see Samuel Iosif as he died in late 1920s. My paternal grandmother Shifra was about five years younger than my grandfather. She had always been a housewife. She took care of the household and raised children. Both of my grandparents were illiterate, but very religious. None of them knew how to read in Ivrit, but they said prayers as they knew them by heart. The family was poor, but not indigent. Grandfather's earnings were enough for the family to get by. The Birgers had their own small house, consisting of three rooms, a kitchen and many larders. There was a big yard, where there was a stable with two - five horses, depending on the season. Grandfather took good care of them. Samuel Iosif did not get his children educated fairly thinking that there was no use in finishing lyceum to drive a cab with horses and transport people and luggage.

There were four children in the family of Samuel Iosif and Shifra: two daughters and two sons. I do not remember the name of my father's younger brother. I saw him only once, when he visited us in Jonava. Father's brother lived in Kaunas. He owned kerosene lamp there. Father's brother was married and had children. I do not know their names either. My father's brother family perished in Kaunas in the 1940s during occupation. Father's sister Reizl was born in 1903. She left for Palestine in 1933. There she married a Lithuanian Jew Pinshtein and gave birth to three children. Reizl died in Israel the 1970s. Their children are still living there. I know that one of her daughter's name was Sarah. We do not keep in touch with them.

Father's sister Leya was the closest in the family. She was five or six years younger than my father. Leya was the only one from the family who was literate. I do not know where she studied. She knew how to read and write in Yiddish and Russian. She read books and knew the rudiments of accounting. Leya married a local Jew Moishe Adashkis, who was in charge of fire-fighters' team of our town. Moshe, Leya and their children lived in a mansion by the fire-fighters' office and a garage with the only fire truck in town and all necessary fire-fighting equipment. Our house was right in front of Leya's one. I spent my childhood with my cousins- Rahmil and Etka, children of Leya and Moishe. Rahmil was one year older than me and Etka was about three years younger. When grandfather died, grandmother Shifra lived with Leya's family.

My father Gedali, born in 1900, was the eldest in the family. I do not know whether he went to cheder during his childhood. Even if he went there, his studies did not last long as my father was illiterate. Since young age he had helped grandfather groom the horses. He became the cabman at a rather young age after grandfather's death. He had to be the bread-winner of the family. He got married rather late, when he and mother was about thirty. It probably was due to the fact that he would not be able to provide for two families. Thus, he had to make sure that his younger siblings stood one's own feet.

My mother Riva Benisevich was my father's cousin. At that time incestuous unions were rather common. Maternal grandmother Haya was grandmother Shifra's sister. My maternal grandfather Alter Benisevich was a cabman. At that time cabmen considered to be the lowest class in the

conventional hierarchy of craftsmen. Like paternal grandparents grandfather Alter and grandmother Haya were illiterate, but very religious. I remember Alter very well. He was a tall sinewy man. He seemed old to me though in the 1930s he was not more than sixty. He had a long beard and wore a cap or a hat. Grandmothers Haya and Shifra wore head kerchiefs. I had never seen them with their heads uncovered. They wore long dark dresses even in summer.

Children in grandfather Alter's family were not educated either. The three daughters, had helped grandmother Haya about the house since early childhood. Grandfather needed a hand as well. In summer it was necessary to procure the forage for the horses. My mother and sisters mowed hay. My mother had two sisters. One of them Vera, born in 1904, remained single. She lived with her parents and helped grandmother about the house. Later when my mother got married, Vera started helping her. Mother's second sister married Trotsky. I do not remember her husband's first name. They also lived in Jonava. They had two children, but I rarely kept in touch with those cousins. When Great Patriotic War was unleashed [2](#), the husband of my mother's sister took his family in Vilnius, where his parents lived. We parted on the first day of war and had never seen each other again. Their neighbors told us after war that fascists had the family of Trotskyism return to Jonava. They most likely were killed there during one of the actions.

### **Growing up**

My parents got married in 1930. They went under chuppah in the synagogue. They had a wedding party in grandfather Alter's wedding. There were very many people as newly-weds had common relatives. I was born on the 3rd of March 1931. I was named after my grandfather Samuel Iosif and that name was written in my birth certificate issued by rabbi. In 1933 mother gave birth to a son Natan. The family called him tenderly Notke. In 1936 my brother Gershko was born.

Our family lived in a large house with mother's parents. It was not our place, we rented two large apartments. Our rooms were to the right from the entrance and grandfather Alter and grandmother Haya lived to the left from us. The landlord of the house was old believer Aleksandrov. Our family occupied two rooms. We, boys, slept in one of them. We had good wooden beds. The youngest Gershko slept in a cradle in the parents' bedroom - it was a lighter and cozier room. Parents' large and comfortable bed with a tester was made by Jonava joiners. There was a round table in the middle of the room. There was also a leathern couch, small bookcase with few books. There was nobody to read them as parents were illiterate. Grandfather Alter and grandmother Haya occupied two smaller rooms. One of them was a drawing-room and another narrow one like a pencil - box was their bedroom. The most spacious was the kitchen of 50 square meters. There was a large Russian stove [3](#) and tables there. There was a large round table in the middle of the kitchen. The whole family dined there on Sabbath and holidays.

There was joiner's shop in the frontal part of the building. That premise was rented by a Jewish family, where two brothers dealt with furniture production. There was an orchard in front of the house. There were fruit trees, chestnuts, black currant and gooseberry bushes. The stables of my father and grandfather Alter were in the heart of the orchard. There were five big dray horses in the stables. Grandfather owned three of them. Both grandfather and dad dealt with goods transportation. Father harnessed troika (three horses harnessed abreast) in a large cargo cart with the platform and carried goods. He often went to Kaunas, Kadeinai and other Lithuanian towns. Father made good money. I remember that in the 1930s, when president Smetona was in power [4](#)

my father daily earned 15 litas. It was a lot of money. It was enough for food and family of the family of five, forage for the horse their grooming and for the rent of the house. Father usually gave money to mother and left a small amount for himself for cigarettes as he was a hard-boiled smoker. In summer father procured forage for the horses. When I grew up, I went with father to mow hay. We brought full carts if forage. It was hard to take care of five horses. Sometimes father hired people who groomed horses.

Father also took care of provision for family. He often went to the village and brought potatoes, vegetables and beef. When father brought meet mother made it kosher herself. She used board with special notches so that the blood from meet could trickle down. Usually, she bought meet in Jewish stores. One peasant, Old-believer brought us milk and other dairy products. Poultry-chicken, turkeys and geese -were purchased in the market and taken to shochet. Sometimes I went there with my mother. Shochet had a small shed in the yard of synagogue. He swiftly cut fowl's throat and then hung it over a special tub with the funnel, wherefrom blood trickled down. After that women plucked the poultry in the yard. In our family kashrut rules were strictly observed .

We thoroughly got ready for Sabbath. Mother and aunt Vera cleaned apartment, washed floors and polished furniture. Gefilte fish was slowly baked in the oven. It was a traditional Sabbath dish. Grandfather went to the synagogue every day, and father went there on Fridays and Saturdays. He usually put a dressy black suit on, when he went to the synagogue. Grandfather usually wore a kippah, and father wore a cap. Women took care of cooking. We had a huge stove. On Friday mother put cholnt there. It was a large pot with meat, potatoes and beans. Neighbors brought their pots with cholnt to us as we had a large stove. On Friday, when father and grandfather came back from the synagogue, we, dressed up, were sitting at the table, being agog to see them. Mother or grandmother lit the candles. Father read a prayer over bread and wine and the supper started. On Sabbath both parents went to the synagogue. Our neighbors came to us to pick up their cholnts on their way from the synagogue. On that day we were not supposed to work. Usually some of the peasants came to us to stoke the stove, give fodder to the horses and do other necessary work. It was amazing that the peasant who came to us on Sabbath spoke Yiddish to my parents. At that time people of different nationalities got along very well. My father was acquainted with a lot of non-Jews. Russians, Poles and Lithuanians worked for the Jews in the stores, in furniture production and due to that they were fluent in Yiddish. My mother did not speak Russian, but she spoke broken Polish. She did not know Lithuanian either.

We marked all Jewish holidays. Usually the whole family including grandfather Alter with grandmother Haya, aunt Leya with her family and aunt Vera got together in our large kitchen. I remembered Pesach best of all. We started getting ready for the holiday beforehand. The preparation was thorough. There was a large pot in the middle of the yard over the fire. All dishes-pots, casseroles, pans -were put in it for koshering. There were special Paschal table dishes and silverware. It was a festive set. It was kept on the garret and taken out only before the holiday. In the evening before seder all non-kosher dishes as well as bread and loaves were put in special sacks and taken to the garret so that there was no leavened bread in the house. The children were bought new clothes before the holiday. I remember one funny story in connection with this. Parents bought me new clothes- a suit consisting of velvet pants and jacket, hat and patent leather shoes. My cousin Rahmil and I played 'war' game in the yard. During the game I tore my pants when I was climbing down the fence -my pants were caught in the fence and when I was trying to free myself,

they got ripped. I decided not to go home. At dusk, I heard worried voices of my parents, who were looking for me in the orchard. I was hiding in the bushes. Of course, father found me very quickly. I was not punished strictly as it was a big holiday and people were supposed to be kind, towards their loved ones and especially to children. There was another Paschal story. This time father had to take a strap. Father was on the cabstand, the place at the end of the street we lived in Jonava, where freight and passenger cabs were parked. Clients came over there to hire a cab. When I was a teenager there was another frolick on Pesach. As a kind of childish protest I climbed to the garret, took a chunk of bread with a piece of sausage and went to the cabstand where my father was working. Having seen me father was in stupor because of my boldness. Then he darted out after me with a whip. Father bore a grudge against me for a long time and could not forgive me that foolish prank. Usually the celebration of Pesach was very ceremonious. Mother, grandmother and aunt Vera cooked a lot of scrumptious dishes. Some of them were made from matzah. There were also chicken broth, chicken stew, fish and deserts- imberlakh and matzah cake. In the first Pascal evening the relatives got together. As a rule aunt Leya with her husband and children came over. There were other relatives as well. Grandfather Alter, clad in festive white shirt and a vest was reclining on the pillows at the head of the table. He carried out seder. Grandpa hid a piece of matzha under pillow. I and other children had fun looking for it. One of the children asked four traditional questions. First I was the one who asked questions, later the youngest was asking them.

I vaguely remember the rest of the holidays. Rosh Hashanah was associated with a lot of deserts. I liked apple with honey. On Yom Kippur parents fasted and spent the whole praying. We, children were not compelled to fast. We took advantage of the absence of parents and ate everything we could at home. I liked Sukkoth. The stands for sukkah were kept in the shed. Father set up those stands in the yard and put fir branches over them. For the whole week we had eaten in sukkah and played in the yard in spite of cold weather. When we felt bored playing in our sukkah, we ran to aunt Leya's yard and played in her sukkath. I liked to watch singing and dancing Jews carry torah scroll from synagogue on Simchat Torah holiday. The joyous procession went around synagogue and entered it from another entrance located in front of the main one. We, children, were most looking forward to Channukah. We liked to play with spinning top and eat tasty latkes. Mother lit candles in a sconce called channukia, which was on the window-sill. Grandfather Alter gave so-called chanukkah gelt, we were so agog to get. On Purim mother baked hamantashen with poppy. I do not remember anything else regarding this holiday. Maybe there were pageants in rich families and shelakmones were taken to each other. The only thing I remembered was freshly baked poppy rolls and scrumptious meal.

In the evening Jonava inhabitants dressed to the nines and took a walk on Liberty Square. Later the cinema was open there. It was the only amusement for the dwellers of the town. I do not remember whether there was a permanent theatrical troupe in town, but I can recall from childhood that there were theatrical performances. Though, my parents did not attend theater. They were illiterate and rather uncultured. That is why we children were not raised to have a thirst for knowledge. I went to school when I turned eight. Before that I used to play with my brother in the yard, ran along with other boys in the street. The only hobby father could afford was football. He was a very ardent fan of that sport. I remember he took me to the stadium with him when football team of Maccabi [5](#) came in town. There were sports clubs of Maccabi in Jonava as well, there was also Betar [6](#). I do not know whether there were other Zionist organizations in our town. My parents were apolitical. I went to the cinema rather often because my aunt Leya used to work in the cinema as a barmaid and she



let me in so that I could watch a movie for free. I enjoyed mute comedies most of all.

There was school named after Sholem Aleichem in Jonava [7](#), where subjects were taught in Yiddish. In 1939 I went to Ivrit pre-school. Frankly speaking it was hard for me to study. Things teachers told were unclear to me. I was really lacking behind as compared to the others, more well-prepared students. There was nobody at home who could help me out. I did not like school and was looking forward to holidays. Summer holidays of 1940 brought changes for the entire Lithuania.

### **The Soviet Invasion of the Baltics**

In June 1940 Soviet army troops came in Lithuania [8](#). For about 24 hours Soviet soldiers had been marching across our town. Almost all inhabitants, including me had kept long hours at the bridge across Neris and watched troops moving across Kaunas. There were tanks, planes and infantry. It was mirthful and appealing to us boys, and adults were astir. Though, my parents calmly took Soviet regime. No Soviet troops were positioned in Jonava. They were in the camp in the forest not far from the town. When Soviet soldiers appeared in town, we were running after them begging for starlets from their field caps, which was the most valuable trophy for us. A large screen was installed on the central square, which was renamed Kaunasskaya when the Soviets came. Soviet movies were demonstrated there. Though, I hardly anything understood in Russian, I liked Soviet comedies very much, where happy Soviet life and common working people were depicted.

Town changed when the Soviets came to power. Clever people made an innuendo that father could be repressed for being an owner. Thus father and grandfather Alter entered cooperative society of cabmen and started paying taxes on a regular basis. This way father managed to avoid deportation [9](#), which was inevitable for many dwellers of the town. It was not that important for Soviet regime whether the family was rich or not. If the host had some sort of the property, it was nationalized and the family was exiled. I remember our neighbors were evicted. They were rich people, the owners of furniture factory. Unfortunately, I do not remember their names. All members of their family-(old people and kids as well) got on the carts . They were taken to the goods station and sent to Siberia.

Our life practically remained unchanged. The horses, which were considered the property of cooperative society of cabmen, stayed in our stables and father groomed them they way he used to. I spent almost all the summer with father- helped him load the goods and take them to the villages, procure hay and products. In autumn I went to the first grade of my school. The teaching remained in Ivrit. None of us knew Russian. The second year of studies was hard on me. It was mostly likely incapable.

### **During the war**

Early morning, on the 22nd of June 1941 father left for Kadeinai with the cargo of 10 cubic meters of forest. Somehow he managed to find out about the outbreak of great patriotic war and made the only right decision he could possibly make under the circumstances. Father unloaded the cargo and turned back home. He told mother and grandmother to pack right away. Father had not doubts- escape from Hitler as Jews would not be spared. Father harnessed three horses and tied two of them on the side to change horses later. Our belongings were loaded on the platform- linen, pillows, blankets, winter clothes, sacks with provision. The four of us sat there- mother, I and two brothers. Father was reining. Grandfather Alter harnesses three of his horses and grandmother

Haya and aunt Vera got on his card. We were on the road.

Moishe Adashkish – aunt Leya’s husband – removed water barrel from fire-fighting machine and the workers made the trailer very swiftly. Leya and her children, grandmother Shifra and Moishe got on that trailer and left as well. Though, they left couple of hours later than we did. We did not know what happened to them until 1942. We joined the flow of refugees. It was a scary scene: whole families with old people and kids went on the carts, or on foot along dusty road. Retreating units of Soviet army went along with us. Refugees were bombed, and the fascist definitely saw that they were bombing peaceful people. The planes flew at a low altitude and shot wretched people from gun at a contour flying. In couple of kilometers our relative- joiner Katz and his wife Rahil joined us. He rescued us as he was very literate, could read geographic maps and could speak Russian. Some Russian officer gave him a map and advised not to be on the bombed road, but to go through a forest. We took back roads to reach Latvia. At one of the stations a Soviet officer stopped us and demanded to give him horses. He explained that horses were needed in the front and took the eight horses which belonged to us. We took goods train along with other refugees. We had covered only 100 kilometers and were told to get off the train. There was a barn right in the middle of the field and we were told to go there. The officer said that the train was to head to the front to evacuate the wounded. He also added that the war would be over in couple of weeks and they would come and get us. We stayed in the barn for couple of days. Uncle Katz and father went to the nearest town. There they found out that German army was 3-4 kilometers away from us. Uncle and father came to get us. We packed quickly and were on the road. In couple of kilometers grandfather Alter sat by the curb of the road and said that he could not walk any longer. Grandfather asked us not to wait for him and go on. He said he would rest for a while and then he would catch up with us. The picture of my grandfather swathed in the blanket, waving goodbye to us, was embossed in my memory for ever. It was the last time I saw my grandfather Alter. We moved on. Uncle was constantly looking at the map. There was all kind of trouble on our way. I caught cold. Father and uncle carried me in hands by turns as I had a fever. My brother Natan got lost. Mother, like insane, had been running along the road until some local woman brought him to us. We walked for about 200 kilometers and reached Russian town Velikiye Luki.

The town was rather calm as there was no bombing. We were told to go to the train station, where the train with refugees was about to leave. We got on ordinary passenger car, which was cram full with people. In half an hour there was a raid of fascist planes and the car which seemed chock-a-block, was additionally packed with local dwellers, who also decided to leave. The train headed towards east. In a while we had to change the trains and took goods car as our car was overcrowded and there was more space in goods car. We were on the road for a long time. At the stations father and uncle got off the car to bring some boiled water. Sometimes they brought some yucky gruel, which was cooked for fugitives. Couple of time we were given rye bread and big lumps of sugar. I hunkered for sugar, but mother gave us a tiny peace and hid the rest. The train was often bombed. Again, the way it was during our escape from Jonava, fascists saw that they were bombing peaceful citizens. At the beginning of the raid we rushed from the cars and hid in the nearby bushes. Many people remained motionless after raid. Many people perished. In couple of days mother and grandmother Haya said they did not want to leave the car during bombing- are as it may. Soon there was another unpleasant thing. At one of the stops father was taken by military patrol, which walked along the station. Father was drafted in the labor front [10](#) and we could hardly say good-bye to him. Uncle Katz stayed with us, he was older, so he was not touched. It took us a

about three weeks to reach Tartaria, having covered the distance of 2000 kilometers. I do not remember the name of a big junction point, where we got off. Uncle Katz and his wife decided to move further to Chuvashia. We decided to stay here. Mother and grandmother did not give up hope that grandfather Alter would be able to catch up with us

All fugitives, who got off the train, took trucks. We were taken to village Zavolgiye. All evacuees were housed in barracks and offered jobs. There was a large brick plant in nearby village. Mother and aunt Vera went to work at the plant. Aunt Vera molded bricks- shoveled heavy clay paste in the mould. When the clay got hard, it was fired in the furnace. My mother stood behind the furnace and put the bricks on special trays on trolleys. It was a hard work. Neither mother nor Vera was involved in hard physical labor before war. Brother and I remained in the barrack. At nights, when mother and auntie worked in night shifts, I was scared off by huge rats running in the field and tired people, who had been clattering with big sticks on the floor. In the afternoon I walked around the village and asked for food. In general Tartars had an attitude towards Jews, but they were sorry for children. I, being incapable of studying in my native town, rather quickly learnt how to ask for certain things in Russian and Tartar. I had a flaxen sack, in which I brought my catch- chumps of bread, spuds, sometimes apple and. Mother and aunt received food cards [11](#). Just 200 grams of halfdone rye bread was given for children and grandmother, so we were constantly being starving. In late 1941 grandmother Haya died by hunger. Her health was also ruined by maladies and yearn for grandfather. As usual on that day I walked around the village and when I came back in the barrack Haya's body was cold. Having never seen cadavers, I felt no fear or pity. By that time all my senses had become numb due to constant famish. Mother and aunt Vera buried grandmother themselves and read kaddish over her body. They dug a grave outside the village and brought grandmother's body covered in a sheet, buried her and put a heavy stone on her grave. They tried their best. Tartars, who were Muslims, refused from burying a Jew. Mother used to pray a lot here in those hard conditions. There was no way we could think of traditions as the most important was to survive. Sometimes Jewish women got together and prayed for their loved ones and children.

In spring 1942 aunt Leya Adashkene came to us without preliminary notice. Her husband Moishe was drafted in the newly formed Lithuanian division # 16 [12](#). Leya managed to find us somehow. It was a joy mixed with bitterness. Leya told us about their way to evacuation. She said that the six of them – she, her husband, their son Rahmil, daughter Etkka and grandmother Shifra left Jonava couple of hours later than we did. The sixth was a baby, who was couple of weeks old. Leya gave birth to her youngest son in May 1941. They were fiercely bombed on their way and they hid in one of the houses. That building was hit by a shell and everybody who was there scattered from the building. I cannot get how it could have happened that during terrible bombing and panic they lost each other – Leya lost her husband Moishe, Rahmil and Etkka. The baby was killed at once and wounded grandmother Shifra was on the brink of death in the devastated house –her legs were torn from blast. Leya frantically was running around the town in flames. She found Moishe but she could not see children. They went farther and settled somewhere in Gorky oblast. As soon as Moishe found out about reforming of Lithuanian division in December 1941, he left there. Leya had been looking for her children and kin for a long time and finally she found out about us from some of her acquaintances. She thought we were the only ones out of her family who survived.

Aunt Leya also moved in our place. She was not only literate, but also had a more robust health and stamina. Leya went to work in timber rafting. She worked with men. In summer I also started



working- herding kolkhoz cattle. I knew how to ride since childhood and it was easy to take a horse and ride along the pasture. The chairman of kolkhoz was very pleased with me and gave me trudodni [13](#). In summer I was involved in harvesting. I tilled the land on tractor. I did not go to school in that village either because there was no school at all, or because I had other things to worry about- earn my bread and butter. We did not know anything about father at that time and thought that he was not alive. Mornings and evenings through mother had been praying about him. On Yom-Kippur she and the aunts fasted in spite of the fact that by the vicissitude of fate our life turned into a long fasting.

We had stayed in a village for a year. In spring 1943 Leya fell from the horse and injured her leg. She had stayed in the hospital for a long time. When she recouped, she insisted on our moving to town Bavly, 30 kilometers away from our village. We rented a room from Tartars. They treated us good. More modern and educated people lived there. It was not important for them which religion people were professing. Mother and aunt were offered a job in some workshop. In summer 1943 father managed to find us. He had worked on some sort of construction site out of Moscow. Due to his health he was sent in the rear. We were so happy that father was again with us. He found a job at some workshop as a guard. At nights I came to my dad. We fell asleep at large cutting tables. That year, 1943 aunt Leya found her children. As it turned out they were saved by Jonava inhabitants. They took them away from burning town and then gave them to the Lithuanian orphanage in village Konstantinovo, Kirov oblast. Aunt Leya left for her children. She decided not to take them from the orphanage as they might have died by hunger. Leya found a job in a village not far from orphanage and came to see her kids rather often.

### **After the war**

Finally my younger brothers and I went to school in town Bavly. All of us- 7-year old Gershko, 10-year old Natan and at the age of twelve went to the first grade. Subjects were taught in Tartar and I learnt the language very well. Life gradually was getting better. But in spring 1944 father was called in the military enlistment office. This time he was drafted in Lithuanian division 16. Mother and I stayed in Bavly. During his service in that division father took part in liberation Vilnius, Lithuania. When the war was over, he had stayed in the army for couple of more months. We dreamt to come back home. We were supposed to have an invitation letter in order to come in Lithuania. When father was demobilized from the army he settled in Vilnius and sent us an invitation.

In early 1946 mother and I finally got a permit, took the train and went home. We went on an ordinary passenger train, in an open-plan carriage. After several years of deprivation that trip seemed a holiday top me. We had spent the whole day in Moscow as we had to change trains there. I was impressed by the capital. I had never seen such a huge city before. Father met us in Vilnius. It did not take my parents long to make a decision to stay in Vilnius. Nobody wanted to go to Jonava as there were practically no Jews. We were not willing to walk along the streets imbued with the blood of our kin. Almost all surviving Jonava Jews, or those ones who returned from the front and evacuation settled either in Vilnius or Kaunas. We had stayed in the synagogue for couple of days. Here all new-coming Jews came over. We settled in one of empty apartments, but hardly had we stayed there for couple of days and we were evicted. It was a large apartment in downtown area. Some sort of organization took it for its office premises. At night a ceiling fell in another apartment we were told to move in. At last we were provided with the room at Russo street (it was

previously called Russkaya). Half of the house was taken by publishers. Our room was not heated. There was a large round iron stove in the room and we stoked it with firewood. The five of us settled in that room - mother, father, father, I and two my brothers. Aunt Vera was offered a job of a house-keeper by roentgenologist Shneider. She settled in his house. His wife was a dentist. Vera did all house chores and took care of children. Vera and I were happy as those were the years of hunger and every extra 'mouth' in the family was a burden.

Life was hard on us. Father was the only bread-winner. She worked as a loader. He carried heavy rolls of paper and print samples to the publisher. In the period of 1946-47 bread and primary goods were sold by food cards. We had to stand in the line at night in order to get the products by cards - the way it was in military years. Once, our food card was stolen and we had been starving for entire week. I went to study. It was even harder for me than in pre-war period as I was an overage. In 1948 our family was stuck by a sorrow. Father's heart, being troubled by a hard physical labor, suddenly stopped. Father was buried in summer 1948 at the age of 48. It was a Jewish funeral with all Jewish rites being observed. He was carried to the cemetery on the boards and shivah was observed at home. When the mourning was over, it was decided by our family that I had to work as I was the oldest brother in the family and so-to-say the only bread-winner. I became apprentice of the printer and soon started working independently. I worked on platen, where rather high skills were required. I set printing mould, evened it and followed the quality of printing. I liked my job. Unlike my school I felt confident there. Mother also had to look for a job. She started working as a janitor in a bar by train station.

When we were left without the bread-winner, aunt Leya was helping us out a lot. Her husband Moishe came back from the front with impaired stomach. When Leya found a job, she took her children from the orphanage. The biggest tragedy of the family was that son Rahmil could not forgive his mother for leaving him and his sister in the orphanage. He thought that it would have been better to share the last slice of bread, and stay with mother. Rahmil could not live in the family and left for studies in Kaliningrad. There he served in the army and after demobilization started living on his own. Etkā lived with her parents. In 1949 Moishe was arrested when anti-Semitic state campaigns commenced [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [14](#). He was sentenced to 10 years in camps in accordance with the political article 58 of Civil Code of USSR [It was provided by this article the any action directed against upheaval, shattering and weakening of the power of the working and peasant class should be punished] - and nobody explained what he did wrong. There was no trial, he merely was arrested and that was it. After husband's arrest aunt Leya lived modestly by herself. There was nothing she could help us with. Moishe came back home after Stalin's death, when unfairly condemned were released. In 1956 he was rehabilitated [15](#). His health was completely undermined and Moishe died in 1959. Aunt Leya survived him by eight years and died in 1967. She was buried next to my father in Jewish cemetery of Vilnius in accordance with the Jewish rites. Her children Rahmil and Etkā are currently living with their families in Israel. They have grandchildren and great grandchildren.

I had worked for publishers since 1951. Here in joined komsomol [16](#). In 1951 I was drafted in the army. I served in Siberian city Omsk [3500 km from Vilnius] in communications squad. First it was very complicated. It was the time of anti-Semitic campaigns, when Jews were blamed in treason and cosmopolitanism. Common soldiers were not thinking who was right or wrong and I personally felt what anti-Semitism was about. There were cases when I was rudely called 'zhyd' [kike]. Clever

people helped me out. Headquarters commander of our regiment and political officers were Jews. They involved me in komsomol work. I was assigned secretary of komsomol organization of the battalion and it was a rather important position. Since that time all cavils regarding my nationality stopped. In March 1953 we were maneuvering in the field, we found out about Stalin's death. Maneuvering was cancelled. We got on the trucks and went to Omsk. During the mourning period we took turns in the sentry by the leader's portrait. Another splash of anti-Semitism in our regiment took place when Beriya [17](#) was dismissed from his position and arrested. Our soldiers did not know that he was a Georgian but they thought he was a Jew judging by his last name. Again there were talks that Jews were guilty of everything. My patrons - headquarters commander and political officer suggested that I should join Communist Party. They sent me to the party school of the division. Upon finishing it I became the candidate to the Communist Party. I had a lot of work to do - I was in charge of the paper, had discussions with the soldiers about politics of the party and Soviet government. I was promoted in rank. In 1954 I was demobilized from the army as a first class private.

Mother lived by herself in her own apartment. Our room was annexed to publishers and she was evicted. Brothers had left Vilnius by that time after graduation of 7-year school. Mother was still working as a janitor. I found a job rather quickly as I was the candidate to KPSS which was rare in Lithuania. I was hired as a locksmith - assembler by electric welding equipment plant. I did very well. I was raised in my class and made pretty good money. When mother turned 55 I insisted on her retirement. I was admitted to the communist party and again I was offered social work. Soon I became the party officer of the second workshop, where welding machines were produced.

In 1956 I met a Jewish girl, who was hired by our plant as an economist. I liked her at once. She also fell in love with me. Soon I proposed to her. My fiancée Maya Zouber was born in Byelorussian town Bobruysk in 1935. Maya's father was a gifted engineer but he was not admitted to the institute as his father was a shochet. Having no higher education, Maya's father was in charge of tractor station. In 1937 when repressions were in full swing [Great Terror] [18](#) he like many others was charged with sabotage and arrested. Maya's father was sentence to ten years without a right to correspond with anybody. Maya's mother Bronya Zouber went to Moscow and tried to find out the truth. She was directly told if she wanted to save her and her children she should ask no extra questions. Maya did not know her father. He was most likely executed shortly after arrest. During the Great Patriotic War Maya, her mother and elder sister Emma were in evacuation in Siberia. When the Great Patriotic War was over, they came back to their native town. Maya entered vocational school of timber industry. Upon graduation, she got a mandatory job assignment [19](#) in Vilnius. Like many other unfairly condemned, Maya's father was rehabilitated after Stalin's death and XX Party Congress [20](#). It was at the time, when I met Maya and decided to be together.

In March 1957 our marriage was registered in marriage register office. We had neither wedding band nor wedding attire. At home mother made dinner and invited my brother Natan and his wife, aunt Leya with husband and Etkā and aunt Vera. We lived with my mother. In May my wife and I went to Bobruysk. I met my mother-in-law Bronya and wife's elder sister Emma. Here we also marked our wedding. Since that time I was a dear guest in Bobruysk and my wife's kin came over to see us as well. Now my mother-in-law and Emma are living in the USA. They immigrated there in early 1990s.

I was married, had children, therefore I ought to earn more. I left the plant and went to work at furniture factory, where the salary was higher. I was also involved in social work. I was in charge of brigade, which daily patrolled the streets helping militia with detecting sots and hooligans. I was involved in civil defense. In a word I was an active member of society. At the factory I acquired the skills of sanitary technician and took up that profession. It was rather lucrative as I started having odd jobs in school and at the factory. I provided a rather good living for my family. I was one of the first who bought Zhiguli car. Now I have a German car and make some money as a driver.

My mother helped me the best way she could. She raised my daughters and tried to do work about the house. She strove to keep the Jewish spirit in the house. Of course, we did not observe Kashrut and Sabbath, but on Yom-Kippur all adults in the family fasted. On Pesach we always had matzah, from which mother cooked wonderful dishes. She taught my wife cook them. In 1968 was stuck with palsy. She had been paralysed for 5 years. All that time Maya had been looking after her. My mother died in 1973. It was dreadful for me to watch Jewish funeral of my father and aunts, when the defunct were being carried on the boards and put in graves without a coffin. I decided that I could not put mother straight in earth. Following advice of the religious Jew, who was reading kaddish over my mother, some apertures were made in the coffin. So, mother was buried in the coffin with some holes in it.

My brother Natan went to Karaganda in early 1950s, where he worked at chemical plant. There he married a Mordvinian Anna and went with her to Djambul. Natan has a daughter Elena. She is currently living in Djambul. Natan's wife Anna died in the 1980s. Brother did not get along with his daughter and he came to us in Vilnius. I introduced him to a wonderful Jewish lady Naina, with whom Natan had lived happily ever after. My brother went with her to Israel in early 1990s. Since the young age Natan had been sick. He was poisoned with phosphorus vapors when working at chemical plant. He had been sick for many years in Israel. He had stayed in special oxygen chamber for a year. In 1995 my brother Natan died.

My younger brother Gershko also worked at chemical plant after school. He married a Jewish lady Lyuba. She also worked with him at the plant. They left to her motherland, Byelorussian town Vitebsk. He worked there as a locksmith. Gershko's first son Efim died when he was a baby. His daughter Tatiana is currently living in the USA. Lyuba died in early 1990s. Gershko died in 1997. His death was strange. He was a guest at a peasant wedding and was intoxicated with moonshine, he had been treated with. His son Garik married a Byelorussian woman and took her last name. He is not willing to recognize us, his Jewish relatives. He even does not visit his father's grave. Once a year I go to Vitebsk to go to my brother's grave.

I also went to Jonava. Jewish community as well as Jonava Jews, living in Vilnius, the monument devoted to the execution of Jonava Jews was erected. I do not know for sure, but somewhere in the vicinity of the monument my relatives were buried - the family of my father's brother, my cousin Gita, her husband and children, my mother's sister and her children. I know that here the blood of my tribesmen was shed. This place is sacred for me.

I have wonderful children. Elder daughter was born in 1957. She was named Raisa. At home we call her Raya to commemorate grandmother Haya as those names are euphonic. The second Marina is eight years younger than the elder one. My mother helped us raise daughters. She plied them with love to Yiddish and Jewish holidays. My daughters went to a Russian school. There were a lot Jewish

students there, but Raya and Marina made friends with Jews as well as children of other nationalities. Raya and Marina did pretty well at school. Both of them, finished book-keeping and industrial production faculty of Vilnius University in due time. Our family had a pretty good living. Of course, at first it was hard for young family, but I always worked hard and never found it disgraceful to make money from odd jobs. After retirement I kept working in several places. Every year we went to the resort in Palanga with our girls. Sometimes we went to the Black Sea.

Both of my daughters married Jews. My sons-in-law graduated from one institute Vilnius construction engineering. My elder daughter's husband Boris Bondar has his business in Vilnius. Raya and Boris have son Ilia, born in 1980. Ilia is a businessman as well. He graduated from business school. Ilia is married. Recently his daughter Rita was born. Thus, we are having a great granddaughter.

Marina and her husband Gennadiy Zaher immigrated to Israel in late 1980s. Marina's elder son Roman was born in Vilnius in 1987. He is called Rubi in Israel. I was present at barmitzvah ceremony of my grandson, taken place in Israel. I am happy that my grandson is a true Jew. The second son of Marina and Ilia Itai was born in Holon in 1996. Marina and her husband successfully work in Israel; Marina is a commercial manager of a large firm.

My wife and I kept thinking of immigration a lot. I did not think of immigration when in the 1970s many Jews were leaving for Israel. I was the member of the communist party. In order to leave I had to go through a disgraceful procedure of expulsion from the party and condemnation at the general meeting etc. In the 1990s we received refugee status in the USA and Germany, but we had not made our minds to immigrate. Our elder daughter was living in Lithuania and she was not going to leave. She helps us in everything. She fully paid for my wife's operation. She made arrangements and payment for modern remodeling of our apartment. I visited my younger daughter in Israel four times. I like Israel very much. My wife and I agreed - if we were to immigrate, our choice would be Israel. We are still not thinking seriously of that.

As soon as Lithuanian got its independence in 1991 [21](#), my wife burnt my party membership card. Now we feel freer than we used to in the USSR. We can travel to any country. I am a Jew and I feel no anti-Semitism. Moreover, only now in Jewish community of Lithuania we started feeling ourselves true Jews. We mark Jewish holidays, try to come back to Jewish traditions. At any rate, we do not eat pork, on Sabbath I try not to do hard physical work. Apart from communicating with the Jews from the community, I go to Jonava once a year together with other Vilnius dwellers who were born in Jonava. We are trying to keep in touch with each other, for us not to forget where we came from.

## **GLOSSARY:**

### **1 Old Believers**

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



Russian state, which supported the Nikonian reforms and persecuted those who, under the banner of the old faith, opposed the new order in the church and the secular administration. To be sure, the intensity of their hostility and the language and gestures with which they expressed it varied as widely as their social background and their devotional practices. Nevertheless, when the government applied pressure to one section of the movement, all of its adherents instinctively drew together and extended to their beleaguered brethren whatever help they could.

## **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 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.

## **4 Smetona, Antanas (1874-1944)**

Lithuanian politician, President of Lithuania. A lawyer by profession he was the leader of the autonomist movement when Lithuania was a part of the Russian Empire. He was provisional President of Lithuania (1919-1920) and elected president after 1926. In 1929 he forced the Prime Minister, Augustin Voldemaras, resign and established full dictatorship. After Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union (1940) Smetona fled to Germany and then (1941) to the United States.

## **5 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.

## **6 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. 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 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

## **8 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.

## **9 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 Estonian 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.

## **10 Labor army**

it was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war.

## **11 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.

## **12 16th Lithuanian division**

It was formed according to a Soviet resolution on 18th December 1941 and consisted of residents of the annexed former Lithuanian Republic. The Lithuanian division consisted of 10.000 people (34,2 percent of whom were Jewish), it was well equipped and was completed by 7th July 1942. In 1943 it took part in the Kursk battle, fought in Belarus and was a part of the Kalinin front. All together it liberated over 600 towns and villages and took 12.000 German soldiers as captives. In summer 1944 it took part in the liberation of Vilnius joining the 3rd Belarusian Front, fought in the Kurland and exterminated the besieged German troops in Memel (Klaipeda). After the victory its headquarters were relocated in Vilnius, in 1945-46 most veterans were demobilized but some officers stayed in the Soviet Army.

## **13 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).

#### **14 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'.

#### **15 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.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 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.

#### **18 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.

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

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

### **20 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.

### **21 Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic**

On 11th March 1990 the Lithuanian State Assembly declared Lithuania an independent republic. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held in February 1991, over 90 percent of the participants (turn out was 84 percent) voted for independence. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 6th September 1991. On 17th September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations.