

Feiga Kil

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Riga

Latvia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I met Feiga Kil' in the social center of the Jewish community of Latvia [1](#). The director of the social center, Channa, recommended me to interview her as she knows Feiga very well. Feiga Kil' sings in the Jewish choir, which was founded at the community a while ago. This choir was my first acquaintance with the Jewish community of Latvia. When I was there for the first time, the choir was having a rehearsal and I stayed there to listen to their singing. It was an indelible impression. They put heart and soul into their singing and I could feel it from the first chords they sang. I was delighted. I interviewed Feiga Kil' after choir rehearsal on the premises of the social center. Feiga is petite. She has pepper and salt hair, large dark eyes with the trace of sadness, even when she is saying funny things. Feiga had a very hard life. She had not been pampered since childhood, but she did not become embittered. She remained a kind and outgoing person. She sincerely helps those who need her. It was hard to convince Feiga to speak about herself. She is very modest and she started her conversation claiming that her life was thin. Then she was carried away by her tale and our conversation evolved. Here is her story.

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My family background

My father, Isaac Aizman, was born in Latvia, in Daugavpils, which was called Dvinsk at that time [in 1909]. There were twelve children in the family, eleven brothers and one sister. Father was one of the younger brothers. His sister Golda was the youngest.

Father did not remember his parents. He became an orphan when he was a five-year-old. All he knew was that his father's name was Moische Aizman and Grandmother's name was Roche Aizman. Father said that his parents died in 1914. He could not tell for sure how they died, but he remembered that they were fired at.

Father has only a few vague recollections of that time. He said that his brothers and his little sister Golda, who was only a year and half, were hiding in the field pits. To slake thirst, they drank filthy

waters from puddles. Then they were found by some people. The orphans were supposed to find some shelter. The elder ones became apprentices, the younger ones were taken to the orphanage. When Latvia was a part of Russia, children were taken to different orphanages not only in Latvian, but also in Russian cities. They had a very hard life. They had to do everything themselves.

I vaguely remember only two of my father's brothers. They managed to find each other. I don't remember their names. All I know is that in the 1930s both of them worked and lived in Moscow, and held some high posts. I don't know anything about the other ones. All I know is that after World War II none of them was alive any longer. My father was also dead. So the thread was broken.

Father was taken to the orphanage in Dvinsk. He stayed there until he reached his teens. He went to a Jewish elementary school and most likely to cheder. At any rate, he knew how to read and write both Yiddish and Ivrit. He was also fluent in Lettish and Russian. When father left the orphanage, he could count only on himself. He was supposed to provide for his living. His dream was to become a doctor. Medicine appealed to him since childhood.

I don't know how Father lived for the first couple of years. Then he found work as a nurse's aide at the hospital for the poor. It was a very hard job. He did all the cleaning and washing in the wards and offices, washed the patients, changed bed linen. Of course, his job had little to do with medicine, but Father felt that he helped the sick ones. He also paid attention to the work of the medical attendants and junior doctors and tried to remember those things. He learned more and more and gradually he became a medical attendant.

Later on he entered the medical department. I don't recall in what town. It was hard for him to study. It was because he lacked money and there was nobody to help. On the other hand, he was in a much better position than other students, as he had gained practical experience when working as a medical attendant. Father had to work and study at the same time to pay tuition and to scrape through. He slept two to three hours a day, as he had to do homework for the classes. He lived like that for five years. But still, he coped with the situation and graduated from the neurosurgical department.

He got an offer at the Jewish hospital Bikkur-Holim [2](#) in Riga. Latvia was independent at that time [3](#), the pale of settlement [4](#) was abolished and Jews were permitted to live in Riga. He didn't have anybody in Daugavpils, so he had no reason to come back. Father settled in Riga. He was a surgeon in the Jewish hospital and performed very complicated operations. Only Jews worked in that hospital - both doctors and nurses. The patients were also mostly Jews, but nobody was refused from help. Non-Jews were treated as well. The hospital was maintained by the Jewish community of Riga.

Father decided that he could marry only when he would be able to provide for his family. He could get married, when he started working at the hospital. He wanted to have a family, as he was very lonely. I don't know how my parents met. Mother didn't like speaking about herself. I think, they had a prearranged marriage as Father was living in Riga and Mother - in a small Latvian town, Rezekne. Many generations of my mother's family lived in that town. My maternal grandparents, Velvl Licht and Feiga Licht, were also born there. And all their children were born there.

Rezekne was in the pale of settlement, so it was a truly Jewish town. Before World War II its population was 25 thousand people, and 13 thousand out of them were Jews. Daugavpils, Voroklyane, bordering on Rezekne, were also Jewish towns. There were 23 synagogues, and not prayer houses, in Rezekne before World War II. Only one remained after the war.

Of course all Rezekne Jews were religious, stuck to Jewish traditions. They all spoke Yiddish. Even many non-Jews knew Yiddish. There was a Jewish community, there were Jewish schools, cheders. Like in other places, here poor Jews settled on the outskirts too. There were houses of the rich downtown, belonging to doctors, lawyers, big merchants. Most of them were Jews beginning from the owners of large stores and up to the owners of small ones, where primary goods were sold: groceries, candles etc. There were several shochetim.

The Jewish community in Rezekne dealt with charity. They did not only collect money for the poor people on the occasion of upcoming holidays, they also gave some money to poor Jewish ladies for their dowry, assisted helpless old people and orphans. My mother was born and raised in such a town.

My maternal grandfather, Velvl Licht, was a tailor and had his own shop. Grandfather had to work very hard to provide for his large family. He was not a very expensive tailor. He made clothes for poor people and he was paid accordingly. Grandmother Feiga was a housewife.

There were five children in the Licht family. The eldest was Mother's brother Solomon. Another son was born after him. I cannot recall his name. The third child was Mother's sister Libe. My mother, Tobe-Leya, was born in 1895. The youngest child was Mother's sister Shifra.

My mother and her siblings made cuts and contrived. They even starved at times. Mother wasn't very willing to recollect those times, that's why I don't know much about her childhood and adolescence. Only my mother's brothers got some education. They most likely went to cheder and probably to a Jewish elementary school. Girls didn't have to go to school. When my mother was an adult she learned the rudiments of reading and writing. Grandfather thought that girls didn't need any education. The most important for them was to know Jewish traditions and do things about the house - to be ready to be good wives. All children in the family worked and helped Grandfather in his workshop. In general everybody worked hard to earn bread and butter.

Father must have loved Mother very much if he decided to marry her. It was common to think that mother was not a match for Dad. He was a doctor, a respectable man, made pretty good money, while mother was an illiterate lady, and besides she was 14 years older than Father. If Mother had come from a rich family, people might have thought that it was a marriage of convenience, but her family was very poor. If Father's parents had been alive, they would not have approved of such a marriage. But Father was an orphan, so nobody was in his way. He could do all he wanted.

Mother's parents were not very happy about her choice either. They thought that she was not a match for him and that he would jilt her. They also were perturbed that he was an orphan, who had been living among non-Jews and wandered. Of course, they wanted their son-in-law to be from Rezekne, from the family they knew, a poor one, not the well-to-do. Nevertheless, Mother decided to marry my dad without the blessing of her parents, which at that time was viewed as a trespassing. She went to Riga with Father even before the wedding. They got married in Riga. Of course, they had a true Jewish wedding, with a rabbi and with a chuppah. I don't even know if

Mother's kin was at that wedding.

Mother's elder brother Solomon and his family moved to Riga. Solomon was a barber. He had his own salon in Rezekne, but in Riga he worked for a barber. Solomon and Mother's other brother, whose name I cannot recall, were married. They married two sisters from a large Jewish family in Rezekne. Solomon's wife was Leya, I don't know the other lady's name. Solomon had two children: daughter Libe, born in the late 1920s and son Velvl, named after my grandfather, who died when Velvl was born.

The second brother and his family stayed in Rezekne. They also had two kids. Their daughter Channa was born in the 1920s and their son Velvl was born in the early 1930s. He was also named after Grandfather. I know hardly anything about that brother. In 1937 he and his family left for the USA. Thus, I barely remember him. While mother was alive, she kept in touch with him. Uncle's daughter Channa was a doctor. She had her own clinic. Velvl also got higher education, but I don't know the details. I didn't have any ties with my uncle's family after Mother's death. Of course, my uncle and his wife died a long time ago, and I don't keep in touch with their children.

Both of my mother's sisters lived in Rezekne with their families. The elder, Libe, was married to a Jew from Rezekne. Libe's husband was a craftsman. I think, they had three kids, but I don't even know their names. Mother's younger sister, Shifra, married David Furman. She was a housewife. I don't remember what her husband did for a living. Shifra was childless. Of course, they had traditional Jewish weddings. At home we have a picture of Solomon and his wife's chuppah.

Father worked at the Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim on Ludzas Street. Mother didn't work, she did work about the house. My parents lived in a large apartment on the first floor of the house downtown, not far from the central market in Riga. In that apartment our family lived until summer 1941 before the beginning of World War II [5](#).

There were four children in our family. All of us were born in that Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim where Father was working. In 1929 Mother gave birth to her first child, my older sister Golda, who was named after my father's sister. At that time Father found out for some reason that Golda had died. My brother Moishe, named after our paternal grandfather, was born in 1932.

Growing up

I was born in 1935. I was named Feige after maternal grandmother, who died about one year before I was born. I was a very feeble child and got sick often. Then my parents went to the synagogue where I was given another name Roche, after my paternal grandmother. Jews believed that a feeble child should be given a double name to cheat the death. I am Feiga in my passport and Feige Rocha in my birth certificate. I was the last but one child in the family. My younger sister Libe was born in 1939.

By the way, my parturient mother was assisted by Doctor Berman. He was a student and helped the midwife. In 1960 the same doctor helped me when I was giving birth to my son. I was surprised that Doctor Berman recognized me. He said that such cases were very rare, one per thousand. He loved me like his own daughter. We kept in touch since then and called each other.

Yiddish was spoken at home and it was my mother tongue. In general, Latvian Jews found it proper to know their mother tongue. Jewish traditions were strictly followed. Of course, it was mostly

owing to Mother. Father was a religious man, but not a pious one. He was raised without a family, where he could have been plied with the traditions. Religious was a natural need in him.

Mother grew up in a religious Jewish family and I imbibed Jewish traditions since childhood. She took Jewry with zeal, observed kashrut. Mother strictly set aside milk and meat dishes, we had Paschal dishes, which were used only once a year for Pesach. Mother always marked Sabbath, lit candles. Father did not always take part in Sabbath celebration. He had to work on Saturdays. What could he do if his was the profession of a surgeon. Mother never showed her displeasure and told us if a person saved somebody's life on Sabbath it was pleasing to God.

We always marked Jewish holidays at home in line with the tradition. Both adults and kids were looking forward to them. Mother cooked Jewish dishes for each holiday. She was an excellent cook. Every holiday was traditional in our family. On Pesach Father led the seder. I don't remember the details. All I remember is that kids were anxious for the arrival of Prophet Eliagu. It seemed to us that there was a little less wine in his goblet, and we inferred that it was the prophet who had sipped the wine.

On Yom Kippur everybody fasted – the adults for 24 hour, from one vesper to another and kids for half a day, usually before lunch. My parents took us to the synagogue since early childhood. There were no restrictions. It was up to the parents at what age kids should be taken to the synagogue. We went to the synagogue on Peivatas Street. It is still there. It was not a two-story building, which was common, but a three-story one, as there was also a basement. Men prayed on the first floor, women – on the second. Both men and women could go in the basement. There was a partition dividing the area for males and females. There was a very high attendance during the holidays and not all wishing to pray on a holiday could fit on two floors.

I did not go to school before World War II, I was too young. My elder siblings went to a Jewish school. It was common in Latvia. There were Lettish, Russian, Jewish and German schools. Jews went to Jewish schools and lyceum. It was not compulsory, it was the choice of the Jews.

The Soviet invasion of the Baltics

In 1940 Latvia became part of the USSR [6](#). I don't have any recollections about that time as I was too small. I think, nobody from our family was repressed. We stayed in the same apartment, and nobody was going to evict us. Father was still working in Bikkur Holim. In general, our life practically had not changed. The only difference is that we heard unfamiliar Russian speech in the streets. I didn't know Russian before World War II as I did not communicate with Russian kids. Yiddish was spoken at home, and I also spoke that language with my friends. Of course, everybody knew Lettish in our family. Father was the only one who spoke Russian in our family.

Father was at work almost all the time. He often came home when we were sleeping, and went to work very early in the morning. He had such a job that he even could be called at night if there was a severe case. Maybe that is why I remember every minute spent with my father. We were always happy when Father had a chance to take a walk with us to the bank of the Dautava River. He was a funny and kind person. He was very gullible, like a child.

He always helped the needy: he could give the last piece of bread and shirt to a hungry person. Maybe the hard years of his childhood and adolescence made him so outgoing. Of course, he was

often deceived, but in those cases he only laughed at himself, but still he never refused anybody. Mother was always very kind, though she was very strict with her children. Mother was there every day, but seeing Father was like a holiday.

During the war

When on 22nd June Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Father was drafted into the army right away. He was a military doctor, but he was a surgeon, so he was subject to call up. When leaving, Father had my mother's word to get evacuated. Mother was against evacuation, but Father said that the Germans would kill the Jews. At that time, very few Jews thought that the Germans would kill Jewish people.

In a about a week after Father's departure, when the Germans were approaching Riga, Mother decided that it was time to leave. One of my brightest recollections from that time is as follows: Mother and we were on the way to the train station, where a lot of trains with evacuees were set to go. Mother carried my younger sister Libe in her arms. When we entered Elizabetes Street, which was abutting on the train station, there was a shooting from one of the houses. Those were Letts as the Germans had not arrived in the city yet.

There was an old lady who was coming from the market with a jar of milk. She was hit by a bullet. She fell, her jar broke and the milk spilt. There was a puddle of milk on the pavement which was soon mixed with blood. At that time I did not fully understand what was going on. I was just standing agape and looking. Mother took me by the hand and we ran. I don't remember much, but I will remember that old lady to the end of my days.

We were dashing to the station, and Mother pinched us so that we'd move quicker. I recall, we took some heavy things, bundles, which did not allow us to run. We got on the train. The four of us were together. We reached Matai station. I will always remember the name of that station. I am not sure whether it was in Russia or Ukraine. That station was bombed by German planes. When the aviation raid started, we got out of the cars and stampeded in different directions. My family was out of sight. I was really scared; there was a clatter, explosion, fire. The sobbing and screams could not be muffled by the noise of the explosion. I hid in the crates behind the railroad groundwork.

When it was all over, when the aircrafts flew away, I saw burning cars and people lying on the rails, by the cars. ... I walked through them and looked for my family, but couldn't find them. Then people clad in rail men uniforms came to collect the survivors. We were taken to another train. I was on that train without my family. We were heading to some place in Ukraine, but at Zolotonosha station in Poltava oblast, we were bombed again. We rushed out of the cars to wait for the bombing to end.

We didn't know that Zolotonosha was full of Germans. I don't know why it was decided to have our train go through the occupied territory. Probably, according to the initial information we could go. After the bombing we were found by German soldiers. I only vaguely remember what was going on. My memory must have not let me keep it. The Germans had us stand in line and walk towards the forest belt. There were long trenches as if for piping. We were put in a line and soldiers with guns lined up in front of us. They started shooting at people, who fell in the trenches afterwards. I also fell on the corpses. I was not wounded. Maybe I fell out of fear, maybe I was confused. I was lying among the dead.

When it got dark, the Germans ordered local peasants to bury the corpses. One lady noticed that I was breathing. She picked me up and took me home. I lived in her basement until the liberation of Zolotonosha in 1944. Of course, that lady, Aunt Galya, was taking a risk. If the Germans had found out that she was hiding a Jewish kid, she would have been shot along with me. I could not get it at that time.

I lived in her cellar. She stored potatoes there. There were jars with all kinds of jams. She put a mat in the corner where I had to stay for days and nights like a puppy. I could not go anywhere, or speak out loud, as the neighbors were not supposed to know that she was hiding me. Aunt Galya often came to me to give me some food and to talk to me. I learned Ukrainian from her. Aunt Galya said that when the Germans were attacking Zolotonosha her only daughter, who was my age, was killed by a stray bullet. Maybe that's why she decided risking her life for me. I cannot tell for sure.

I was a beautiful child. I had nice dark, curly hair and a cute face. Aunt Galya liked combing my hair, make braids, adorning my hairdo with bands. She gave me clothes and shoes of her daughter, which was very handy for me, as I had only one dress, which was torn and covered with blood. Aunt Galya looked after me, I was crying constantly having stressed so much. When I got better, Aunt Galya started taking me outside at nights for me to breathe in some fresh air. After all, I spent all my time in a stuffy and moist cellar.

Only when I grew up, I understood what a big risk it was, as someone could have seen us at night and inform the Germans. I dread to think what might have happened to us, but still we got away with it. At that time I was living in constant fear. Aunt Galya was as well, I could feel it. I lived with her until liberation, the fall of 1944. During all that time, I didn't know anything about my family. I thought they had died during the bombing of Matai station.

In early fall 1944 they started attacking Zolotonosha. There were fierce battles for several days. There was shooting from all directions. I was staying in the cellar all the time, I couldn't even go out at night. It was scary. Then it calmed down. Aunt Galya came to me and said that Russian troops were now in Zolotonosha and the Germans were forced out of the town. There was no reason for me to fear anything any more.

After the war

I started going out at daytime. I remember it was so hard for me to get used to bright light. My eyes were sensitive for a long time. About a month passed, and then people were going from house to house, asking if there were any orphans. More and more orphanages were opened on the liberated territories.

I was taken to the orphanage in Zolotonosha. There were kids from every corner of the Soviet Union. I was surprised to see my younger sister Libe in the orphanage. I don't remember how she was found and where. Maybe my sister doesn't remember that, as she was only five years old then. Libe didn't know anything about Golda, Moishe and Mother. I was happy that at least the two of us were together! We lived there for about a year. Then in 1945 my sister was taken to the junior orphanage and I went to school. I was ten, but I went to the first grade only! I get the shivers when I recall that time! Life was hard.

We lived in the orphanage and we went to school, which was several kilometers away from the orphanage. The orphanage was in the former school building, which had been seriously affected by the bombings. The classrooms were transformed into dorms. The rooms were large, and about 30 beds could closely fit in each room.

We got very cold in winter. We had only one poky stove which was stoked with firewood and fagot, collected by us. It wasn't enough to heat the room. The blankets were thin and torn. They didn't keep us warm. There were no toilets on the premises. We had to walk for a kilometer to get to a toilet. In the evening we went there with groups consisting of several people. We cleaned everything ourselves - both the premises and the toilet, we washed and scrubbed the wooden floors, trying to make them clean even without soap. Those orphans who were punished were told to wash the toilets. At that time soap was a luxury and we were given tiny bars of it. We washed our faces with freezing cold water. Very rarely were we taken to the bathhouse.

I had long thick hair and I didn't want to cut it. It was hard to talk about any hygiene in that place. All orphans were lice-ridden. Of course, it was very dangerous, as there was a pandemic of typhus fever in Ukraine and lice were breeders of typhus. In our orphanage many people were afflicted with typhus. For some reason they thought that typhus could be treated with lice. All of us had double combs: one side was with thinner teeth, the other with thicker ones. We put paper on the table, combed lice out of our hair and then put the lice in a matchbox. Then these lice were put in a rye bread and given to the sick ones. The sick people didn't even know what they ate. We bred those lice as we thought that they would cure the sick people. When some of them got better, we thought those people were miraculously cured by lice. Who knows, maybe there was something in that ...

In the hard post-war times, we, the orphans, were very different from our coevals, who were living with their parents. We felt it the most acutely at school. Of course, at that time there were no children who were well-dressed, but as compared to others we looked like scarecrows. Mostly girls were ashamed of their clothes. We were cold and famished. We got only scarce food, so as not to die from hunger. In 1946 there was a terrible drought in Ukraine. There was such starvation!

In spring our teachers took us to the fields for weeding. We had to walk for about 15-20 kilometers from the orphanage. It was hard work, but we were happy for it, as we could find frozen carrots and spuds from previous crop. We dug them out, got rid of the dirt and ate those. It is hard to think of that now...

An elderly man worked as a guard at the orphanage. At times he brought bonbons or slices of bread from home to treat us. We loved him very much. We missed our families and we thought that man to be our kin.

The teachers were very kind. They were very sympathetic and helpful. What could they do, if there were so many of us, and just a few of them? We want to share our concerns and anxieties with them, wanted them to listen to us like Mommy would do. We girls had long conversations at night before going to sleep. We recollected our home, families, shared our dreams about future life, when we would be found. Frankly speaking, I had a forlorn hope that my family would find me. At that time orphans and teachers were my family. When Libe turned seven, she was transferred to my orphanage from the junior one. I was so happy. I spent a lot of time with my sister, trying to take good care of her.

There was an assembly hall with a piano in our orphanage. At times we got together there and our teacher played the piano and taught us how to sing. Those were happy hours, when I forgot all bad things. I had a pretty good voice and an ear for music. After music classes I stayed in the hall and tried playing the melodies I knew. My teacher noticed that and she started teaching music to me independently. Those classes were not regular, but still I learned how to play the piano a little bit.

I didn't feel any biased attitude in the orphanage, any anti-Semitism. I didn't even identify myself as a Jew. All of us were orphans. We got here from different places. We found nothing special about different nationalities, even with broken Russian we understood each other. Being in an orphanage made us one family.

I became a Young Octobrist [7](#) in the orphanage, then I joined the pioneer [8](#) organization together with the class. It was very ceremonious, in the assembly hall in front of a monument dedicated to Lenin [9](#). I was proud of being a pioneer. I understood that I should study well and help others. I took it very serious.

I went to a Ukrainian school in Zolotonosha. All subjects were taught in Ukrainian. I learnt Ukrainian pretty well during the time of staying in the cellar at aunt Galya's place. So, I even stood out among the others. I was a pretty good student, but I did not do exceptionally well. In 1949 I finished the 4th grade of Ukrainian school in Zolotonosha.

Data of the children was collected in the orphanage. Mostly they asked us where we came from and what we remembered about our family. I didn't have any documents with me. When our train was bombed in Matai, I lost Mother's purse with our documents and family pictures. All of us had things to carry and Mother gave me that purse. Of course, I remembered that my last name was Aizman and that I lived in Riga, I knew the names of my relatives. All that information which I shared was recorded.

The Red Cross was in charge of looking for children. Finally, in late September 1949 the headmaster called me and said that in Riga my mother was found. I couldn't believe my happiness. It was true. On 30th October 1949 some kids from Latvia, my sister and I were taken to Riga by our PT teacher. We saw our mom again!

After the bombing at Matai station, Mother was found among the wounded. Either she was confused or stressed, she couldn't see anything or she was sent to the Urals to the house for the disabled. I don't remember the details. Gradually her eyesight was restored and the war was over. Mother came to Riga. She had been looking for us all the time, but in vain. Only in 1949 she found out that Live and I were in Zolotonosha orphanage and that we were on the point of leaving for Riga.

Mother had a hard living. When she came back to Riga, it turned out that our pre-war apartment was occupied. It was on the first floor and it was remodeled into a cobblers'. Of course, nobody was going to close it down to return the lodging to Mother. She was given a room in a communal apartment [10](#), in the basement. It was small and damp. It was hard to squeeze in even a small bed there. Mother didn't work before war as she was fully provided by dad. She didn't have any occupation, so she became a maid. She did odd jobs: cleaning, laundry. Of course she got a skimpy fee, but it was enough for food, at any rate not to die from hunger. My younger sister Libe was taken to the Riga orphanage, but I was older and they let me stay with Mom.

Father perished at the front. He was a military surgeon and worked in a field hospital, where the wounded were taken straight from the battlefield. He was killed during the last war days, in Berlin. Mother got the notification that Father died like a brave man – it was a proper wording for those who were at the front. He perished on 8th May 1945, when the agreement on surrender of Germany was signed. I didn't even have Father's picture, as all photos remained in the purse that was lost during the bombing of Matai station. Later, Mother's pals gave me an old picture of my father.

I also found out that my elder sister Golda came back to Riga. I was happy to find her, but Golda wasn't pleased to see neither me nor Mom. She was like a stranger. We hadn't kept in touch for a while. I don't even know anything about her life. I accidentally learned that Golda died in 1972 and was buried in Riga cemetery.

We failed to find my brother Moishe. I opened a search via the Red Cross, but there was no information about him. He must have died during the bombing at Matai station or somewhere else.

The only other survivors of our kin were Uncle Solomon's family, Mother's brother and her younger sister Shifra and her husband. They were in evacuation during the war, then they settled in Riga. Mother's elder sister Libe and her family died in Rezekene. They either didn't manage to get evacuated, or they were not willing to. When the Germans occupied Rezekene, they put all Jews in the ghetto and shot them. They don't even have a grave.

I entered Russian compulsory school. There were no Jewish schools in Latvia at that time. Besides, I had forgotten Yiddish by that time. I was fluent in Ukrainian, but I didn't know Russian at all. It was hard for me to study. I had to stay in the 5th grade for two years. I spoke bad Russian with a strong Ukrainian accent. I made many mistakes in writing. Though Russian and Ukrainian are very similar, their writing is different. Schoolmates teased me not for being a Jew, but for being illiterate in writing and in speech. Thought, Letts never teased me, only Russians. The languages were hard on me, but I also got good marks in math, as formulae are the same in any language.

Mother couldn't make enough money to provide for the two of us. After school I worked. When I was 14, I worked hard. I was a baby-sitter, a janitor. I was given food for my job. When I washed dishes, I ate the bits and ends from the pots and plates. Of course, I wasn't sated, but I didn't starve. I also studied. Then one family offered me a job as maid to me for boarding. I agreed without hesitation. I grew up in the orphanage and knew how to work. I had a different attitude to life as compared to those who lived with their families all the time, being taken care of by the adults. I was transferred to the evening school. I worked in the daytime and in the evening I attended classes at school. Of course, my life was hard, but I understood that I should count only on myself.

Then I learned that in Ispolkom [11](#) there was a labor commission and I went there. I was offered a job as courier – to take all kinds of papers to the offices. Then I became an accountant in the workshop. I liked the job. I joined the Komsomol [12](#) at the factory and soon I was elected the secretary of the Komsomol committee. [Editor's note: Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities]. I was very active and could find a key to every person. I was respected by all employees, who were mostly men. When I worked at the factory, I was not a maid any more. I started living with my mom. Then we were given another room in the same basement and Mother

took my sister from the orphanage. The three of us started living together.

I finished ten grades of evening school and entered finance college, also the evening department. I worked in the daytime and studied in the evening. Nobody helped me. I did all myself. Of course, it was hard on me, but my orphanage stamina helped me with that. I stayed at my factory after graduation from college. I was not a worker any more. Now I held the position of an economist in the planning department.

In spite of having a difficult life, Mother and I always marked Jewish holidays. It was sacred. We saved up money to buy chicken and fish for the holiday. We tried to mark it in accordance with the Jewish tradition. We also went to the synagogue. On holidays there was no room to swing a cat in the only operating synagogue in Riga. There were a lot of young people there as well. We were not shy of being Jews. I tried to communicate with Jews mostly. Maybe it is not very good, but I am a nationalist in my heart. I am proud of being a Jew. It has always been like that.

We met with my 'tribesmen,' discussed the events in Israel, our intentions to leave there. It was very hard during the Soviet times. People from Baltic countries left for Israel via Poland. It was easier to go to Poland and then immigrate to Israel. I was eager to go. At that time I was dating a guy, with whom I decided to immigrate to Israel and get married there. At that time to depart for Israel it was required to have a written document with the consent of all family members to depart. My mother refused to sign it. She could have gone with us, but she didn't want to leave my sister Libe. Thus, I couldn't go either.

My aunt Shifra and her husband immigrated to Israel via Poland in 1959 after my wedding. Shifra's husband died in the 1980s. I had a chance to see my aunt. I went to visit her in Israel in the late 1980s. I happened to see that beautiful country of Israel. I went on an excursion, tried to see as much as I could. I was so deeply impressed! I was so happy to see my aunt. It was the last time I saw her. She died in the late 1990s.

Mother's brother Solomon and his family left for Israel in the 1970s. Now, both he and his wife are dead. Solomon's son Velvl is currently living in Israel, and his daughter Libe - in France. I don't keep in touch with them.

I met my future husband in synagogue on a Jewish holiday. There were a lot of young people on that day. He came up to me and we had a talk. Young people meet easily. We liked each other and started dating. In 1959 we got married. I had a religious wedding, in accordance with all rites and customs. Our marriage was registered in the state marriage registration office, and at home we had a chuppah. The rabbi came to wed us. Our wedding was very beautiful. Of course, Mother couldn't afford a wedding party for me. Both, my husband and I worked and we put aside money for the wedding.

My husband, Yakov Kil', was born on 31st October 1931 in Dvinsk, in my father's native town. His name is Yakov according to the passport, but the double name Evsey-Yankle is written in his birth certificate. My husband's father, Leib Kil', was in timbering, and his mother, Leya Kil', was a housewife. His mother came from a very religious family. Her father Shi-Yankle was a rabbi in Dvinsk. He died in the 1920s. My husband was named after him. There were four children in the family. Rachmil was the eldest. Ester was born after him. My husband was the third child and the youngest was his brother Benjamin. The family was very religious. All traditions were observed. The

children were raised Jewish.

During the war the family was in the evacuation. Then they moved to Riga. My husband finished compulsory school, worked at a plant. His elder brother Rachmil was a rail man. Rachmil was married, had three children. When the Jewish community of Latvia was founded, Rachmil's daughter worked for the community. In the middle of the 1990s she left for Israel. She is working in an archaeology institute there. Rachmil died in 1994. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Riga.

Ester married a certain Mr. Shneider. She worked in the bread-baking plant in Riga. She had two sons. One of them is currently living in Riga, another one, who is no longer alive, lived in Israel. Ester died in 1985. Only the youngest brother, Benjamin, is still alive. He and his wife retired a long time ago. Their son lives in Israel. Another son is living in Riga and working in a bank. All of them are very nice people and true Jews.

We lived in our basement apartment after I got married. My mother and sister occupied one room, and we the other. Of course, it was hard, but we were young and in love, so we did not fear hardships. In 1960 our son Leo was born. His Jewish name is Leib, after my father-in-law. He had his bris [milah]. There was a minyan. All was done in line with the rite. It was very dangerous at that time and people were convicted for it. Of course, we did it gingerly, trying to do everything quiet for the neighbors not to hear anything. We could not help doing that. It was very important for me and for my husband that our son was a Jew. In 1969 our daughter Anna was born. We call her Channa at home.

My husband and I always marked Jewish holidays. We did it traditionally as we found it important. Our children knew Jewish traditions, rites. Of course, it was not easy. In Soviet times it was hard to buy matzah. If we could not buy it, we baked it. We had all necessary things. My husband made some notched rolls to make holes in matzah and we baked good matzah at home.

Mother and I cooked traditional Jewish dishes: gefilte fish, chicken broth, potato latkes. We loved the Jewish cuisine. On Pesach we didn't eat bread. On Yom Kippur we fasted in line with the tradition. We had special dishes for Pesach. We did all in line with tradition. My husband led the seder and the children were also present. On each holiday the whole family went to the synagogue. We stuck to the traditions of our nation.

Soviet holidays were additional days off for us. It was an occasion to get together with friends, spend time in the company of pleasant people, to dance and sing. We were young. We wanted to dance and sing.

For me, as a kid who was in an orphanage, Stalin became an idol. I sincerely loved him, as I know that if it hadn't been for Stalin, I would have perished. What can I say, if adults also loved him blindly. Though, in the early 1953 there was the Doctors' Plot [12](#), and I understood that it was against Jews. I was alarmed because I understood that our peoples were stigmatized. At that time I started to understand the mendaciousness of the Soviet regime. I couldn't believe that doctors could do harm to people. I was perturbed when hearing that all Jews were blamed. I argued, raising my voice against those who blamed the doctors and Jews on the whole. I was very happy when after Stalin's death those Jewish doctors and all Jews were exonerated.

By the way, after the war anti-Semitism didn't emanate from Letts, but from newly arrived Russians. Letts treated Jews fairly. They didn't like the Jews who arrived from the USSR. They still loathe them, but they respected local Jews. Anti-Semitism came and comes from Russians and even now in Independent Lithuanian [13](#).

At the time, the Doctors' Plot didn't affect my attitude towards Stalin. I remember the day, when Stalin died. There was a town meeting on the main square of Riga. There were crowds of people. Everybody cried and I did so too. I took Stalin's death as my personal grief. Those were sincere tears. I started composing verses, when I was in kindergarten. Maybe it was escapism. When I grew up, I also composed verses, especially when I felt bad. On the day of Stalin's death, I composed a verse dedicated to him. Of course, I don't remember it fully, just a few lines: '...the grand genius passed away, and his ardent speech has lost its way. But each of us will remember him...'

The whole poem was quite long. It was published in a main paper. I think it was in 'Komsomolskaya Pravda.' ['Komsomol Truth' - 'Komsomolskaya Pravda', an all-Union youth paper by the Central Komsomol Committee. It came out six times per week. The first issue came out on 24th May 1925. The paper is not communist anymore and it is still popular and published in FSU countries under the same title.] I was even paid the only fee in my life. I got 75 rubles for that poem. None of my other verses was published. I composed them for my husband and children. I had a lot of poems. When Gagarin [14](#) went into space, I also wrote a long poem. Now, I'm not composing any verses any more.

I remembered the Doctors' Plot very well, when Beriya [15](#) was arrested thinking that the justice prevailed. After the Twentieth Party Congress [16](#) I couldn't believe that all atrocity and injustice in the USSR came from Stalin. I felt hatred, but not towards Stalin, towards the epoch. I thought that Stalin must have been unaware of the things done in his name. Then I changed my opinion of Stalin. Since that time I've hated the Soviet regime as strongly as I love Israel. We followed the events in Israel and we acutely perceived everything what was happening there. I remember, we followed the events of the Six-Day-War [17](#), the Yom Kippur War [18](#) and rejoiced in the victories of the Israeli army. We are proud of this country.

In 1972 my husband was given an apartment. We all lived together. My kids were nice and loving. They did well at school. After school my son entered the light industry college, the refrigerator department. Having finished his studies, he became a refrigerator mechanic. Lev married a nice Jewish lady, Ludmila Shukhman. She is one year younger than him. They have two sons: Semion, born in 1984, and Yakov, born in 1988.

My daughter Anna finished the light industry institute. She is an engineer. She is married. Her last name is Koretskaya. Both my son and daughter had traditional Jewish weddings. Both of them were willing to do that. Anna's husband, Dmitry Koretskiy, was born in 1967 in Riga. He is working in an automobile maintenance company. They have two children: Alexander, born in 1989, and Elina, born in independent Latvia in 1995.

Unfortunately, I see my children and grandchildren rarely. My son and his family immigrated to Israel. They are living in Ashkelon. My daughter and her family are living in Stuttgart, Germany. Their life is good. Of course, I miss my children and grandchildren. They often call, come on vacation, but it is not enough. The children are asking me to come over to see them, but I don't want to. My life has passed here. There are dear tombs for me. My friends are here. Young people

have their path, and I have mine.

Almost all my relatives died. My mother passed away in 1979. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery. Of course, she had a traditional Jewish funeral. There was a rabbi, a minyan. In 1992 my husband died. Only my younger sister Libe is still alive. She has a hard life. She had to go through a hard oncological operation. She is disabled now. I am trying to help her the best way I can. Our Jewish community also helps her a lot.

The Jewish community of Latvia was founded during perestroika [20](#), in 1988. Our community significantly grew and became stronger when the Soviet Union broke up and Latvia gained independence. They gave us the premises which had been occupied by the Jewish theater before the war. Now the Jewish community is based there. It became like a second home for me. The social center of the community, Rahamim, led by Channa Finkenstein, helps us a lot. She is a very good person. She was simply made for this kind of work. People are different, and there are some of them that are hard to deal with. Channa would find a key to everybody. Due to her efforts in Rahamim, a Jewish choir was created. My coevals and people older than me are singing there. We have rehearsals, tour and give concerts in different towns. Channa took care of our outfits, they look very nice.

Recently we gave a concert at the Rezekne Jewish community. I went to the motherland of my father and my husband for several times, but I came to Rezekne thanks to this concert. I was very happy to be there. It was also owing to Channa. She found a bus, arranged a picnic for us. She made sure that all of us would eat and take a rest, as if we were her kids.

I met many new friends at Rahamim. I said that I was a nationalist. Jews always appealed to me. Right or wrong, I am a nationalist, I love my people. I am shining when I hear nice things about my people, when I hear bad things, I grieve. I am happy to be among Jews. I have such a chance in Rahamim. We are like a family here.

There is big help provided by Rahamim. Medical service is very expensive in Latvia, but there is our doctor and a nurse in the center. We can get the medicine, prescribed by the doctor, here. It is very important in our age, when deceases are sneaking up. There is a canteen in Rahamim where people can have meals. Those who are willing to cook at home are given products. It is a big help. I get such rations, which are enough for me. I don't have to buy many things due to that. I am very happy. I cook myself and follow kashrut. I think I got it in my genes. I was raised in the orphanage, survived the hunger, so I can eat anything, but kosher. I like milk and vegetable dishes. I soak and salt meat in line with kashrut.

It would be much harder for me without Rahamim, I am very grateful to Channa. She is a wonderful person, she works very hard. It seems to me that I wouldn't be able to work like she. Everybody is bothering her, both us and administration. She has iron nerves. She bears everything and keeps working. Many thanks to her!

I also try helping Rahamim the best way I can. The lonely, helpless old people received help from Rahamim. It is their job and they are paid money. I am a volunteer. I don't get any money, I just want to help someone who feels worse than me. I look after a lonely woman, Dolgonos. She is completely alone. I take her for walks, do the cleaning, shopping, cooking. I want to do good to people. Maybe it is because I was in the orphanage. I am always there, where someone is in

trouble. Where life is good, I am not needed. If you do good to people, God will reward you, and sooner or later people will be punished for bad things. Am I not right?

Glossary:

1 Latvian Society of Jewish Culture (LSJC)

Formed in fall 1988 under the leadership of Esphi? Rapin, an activist of culture of Latvia, who was director of the Latvian Philharmonic at the time. Currently LSJC is a non-religious Jewish community of Latvia. The Society's objectives are as follows: restoration of the Jewish national self-consciousness, culture and traditions. Similar societies have been formed in other Latvian towns. Originally, the objective of the LSJC was establishment of the Jewish school, which was opened in 1989. Now there is a Kinnor, the children's choral ensemble, a theatrical studio, a children's art studio and Hebrew courses in the society. There is a library with a large collection of books. The youth organization Itush Zion, sports organization Maccabi, charity association Rahamim, the Memorial Group, installing monuments in locations of the Jewish Holocaust tragedy, and the association of war veterans and former ghetto prisoners work under the auspice of the Society. There is a museum and document center 'Jews in Latvia' in the LSJC. The VEK (Herald of Jewish Culture) magazine (the only Jewish magazine in the former Soviet Union), about 50,000 issues, is published by the LSJC.

2 Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim

Established by the community of the same name. It existed in Riga since the late 19th century. In 1924 Ulrich Millman and the Joint funded construction of a hospital where they provided assistance to all needy besides Jews. The hospital consisted of 3 departments: therapeutic, surgery and neurology. Director of the hospital was Isaac Joffe, the director of Riga's health department in the early 1920s. Doctor Vladimir Minz, one of the most outstanding surgeons, was head of surgery. He was the first surgeon in Latvia to operate on heart, brain, and do psychosurgery. Fascists exterminated the hospital, its patients and personnel in summer 1941. Doctor Joffe perished in the Riga ghetto in 1941, Professor Minz perished in Buchenwald camp in February 1945.

3 Latvian independence

The end of the 19th century was marked by a rise of national consciousness and the start of a national movement in Latvia, which was part of the Russian Empire. It was particularly strong during the first Russian revolution in 1905-07. After the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917 the Latvian representatives conveyed their demand granting Latvia the status of autonomy to the Russian Duma. During World War I, in late 1918 the major part of Latvia, including Riga, was taken by the German army. However, Germany, having lost the war, could not keep these lands, while the winning countries were not willing to let these countries be annexed to Soviet Russia. The current international situation gave Latvia a chance to gain its own statehood. From 1917 Latvian nationalists secretly plotted against the Germans. When Germany surrendered on 11th November, they seized their chance and declared Latvia's independence at the National Theater on 18th November 1918. Under the Treaty of Riga, Russia promised to respect Latvia's independence for all time. Latvia's independence was recognized by the international community on 26th January 1921, and nine months later Latvia was admitted into the League of Nations. The independence of Latvia

was recognized de jure. The Latvian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

4 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

5 Great Patriotic War

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

6 Annexation of Latvia to the USSR

Upon execution of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 2nd October 1939, the USSR demanded that Latvia transferred military harbors, air fields and other military infrastructure to the needs of the Red Army within 3 days. Also, the Soviet leadership assured Latvia that it was no interference with the country's internal affairs but that they were just taking preventive measures to ensure that this territory was not used against the USSR. On 5th October the Treaty on Mutual Assistance was signed between Latvia and the USSR. The military contingent exceeding by size and power the Latvian National army entered Latvia. On 16th June 1940 the USSR declared another ultimatum to Latvia. The main requirement was retirement of the 'government hostile to the Soviet Union' and formation of the new government under supervision of representatives of the USSR. President K. Ulmanis accepted all items of the ultimatum and addressed the nation to stay calm. On 17th June 1940 new divisions of the Soviet military entered Latvia with no resistance. On 21st June 1940 the new government, friendly to the USSR, was formed mostly from the communists released from prisons. On 14th-15th July elections took place in Latvia. Its results were largely manipulated by the new country's leadership and the communists won. On 5th August 1940 the newly elected Supreme Soviet addressed the Supreme Soviet of the USSR requesting to annex Latvia to the USSR, which was done.

7 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over

preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

8 All-Union pioneer organization

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

9 Lenin (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

10 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.

11 Ispolkom

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

12 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

13 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.

14 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic

On 4th May 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Republic accepted a declaration about the desire to restore the independence of Latvia, and a transition period to restoration of full independence was declared. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held on 3rd March 1991, over 90 percent of the participants voted for independence. On 21st August 1991 the parliament took a decision on complete restoration of the prewar statehood of Latvia. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 24th August 1991. In September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations. Through the years of independence Latvia has implemented deep economic reforms, introduced its own currency (Lat) in 1993, completed privatization and restituted the property to its former owners. Economic growth constitutes 5-7% per year. Also, it has taken the course of escaping the influence of Russia and integration into European structures. In February 1993 Latvia introduced a visa procedure with Russia, and in 1995 the last units of the Russian army left the country. Since 2004 Latvia has been a member of NATO and the European Union.

15 Gagarin, Yuri Alexeyevich (1934-1968)

Russian cosmonaut, pilot-cosmonaut of the USSR, colonel, Hero of the Soviet Union. On 12th April 1961 he became the first man flying into space on the Vostok spaceship. He was involved in training of spaceship crews. He perished during a test flight on a plane. Educational establishments, streets and squares in many towns are named after him. A crater on the back side of the Moon was also named after Gagarin.

16 Beriia, L

P. (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.

17 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.

18 Six-Day-War: (Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,

Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

19 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War): (Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

20 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.