

# Riva Smerkoviene

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Kaunas

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: October 2005



*Riva Smerkoviene is a petite elderly lady with light, bright and young-looking eyes. She gladly welcomes me and agrees to an interview. Riva lives in a large, rather unkempt apartment in a stone building, constructed on the quay in the 1950s. Riva looks the way a 91-year-old woman is supposed to look: a lot of wrinkles, dry strained hands, very thin gray hair, but her soul is young and she readily dips into her recollections. Her advanced age speaks for itself - she gets tired very quickly. I interviewed Riva on three different days, not exhaust her. Unfortunately, her memory has some gaps. The hardest effort for her is to recall what happened comparatively recently - in the postwar years. Riva's daughter Lena helps her recollect that period of her life. She is currently living in Russia and came here to visit her mom. Both mother and daughter were crying when they talked about the hardships of their lives.*

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## **My family background**

I have lived all my long life in Kaunas with the exception of the several war years. My paternal grandfather, Yakob - Lithuanians called him Yokubas - Gershenovich, was born in Kaunas in the 1860s. He lived with his wife, my grandmother Leya, in a small house on Grushevaya Street in Zelyonaya Gora [there is still a district in Kaunas with that name]. The streets in Zelyonaya Gora had the names of the trees, which were planted there: Grushevaya - pear tree, Slivovaya - plum tree, Vishnevaya - cherry tree. Such neutral names never changed, no matter who was in power and those street names still remain unchanged. Mostly poor people lived in this district, some of them were destitute. The population was mixed, like in other places all over Lithuania - Jews, Lithuanians and Russians. There were several synagogues there, which my grandfather Yakob attended with zeal.

Grandfather was a very religious man. Every Friday he went to the synagogue, having put on his festive kippah and tallit. Jewish customs and holidays were strictly followed in the house of my grandparents. Grandmother always covered her head with a simple kerchief, but on Saturday and

on holidays she put on a white lacy kerchief and dressy apron. Both Grandfather and Grandmother Leya were very pious people and raised their children and grandchildren in a religious spirit.

Yakob worked as a warden at a brewery, owned by a German, Engelman. Grandfather spoke German with the owner. He was fluent in German as well as Yiddish and Russian. Of course, Leya didn't work. She tried to save every kopeck to buy the necessary food, clothes and footwear and educate her children. Yakob had a steady income, but it was rather low, so the family was rather poor. Nevertheless, Grandmother always found something to treat me to, when I dropped by them. I often visited my grandparents Leya and Yakob, as we lived not very far from them, in the same street. My grandfather Yakob and grandmother Leya died in the mid-1930s. I wasn't present at their funeral as I was in political exile. I know that both of my grandparents were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Kaunas in accordance with all Jewish rites and traditions.

Yakob and Leya had five children – two sons and three daughters. The eldest, my father Chaim Gersh Gershenovich, was born in 1886. Father's sister Chaya Feige was two years younger than him. I cannot recall what Chaya Feige's husband, Itshak Grobman, did for a living. I think he was a worker. Chaya Feige and Itshak had five daughters – Hanna, Taube, Bunya, Dvoyre and Sarah. The youngest, Sarah, was born when Chaya Feige was over forty years old, so Itshak's hope to have a son wasn't realized. Chaya Feige wasn't to raise her children – she died in the hospital in 1938 after some operation. The girls were brought up by their father, who wasn't able to put them on their feet. Bunya died from typhus before the Great Patriotic War [1](#). Itshak and Dvoyre died in occupation. Hanna, Taube and Sarah somehow managed to leave and happened to be in one of the orphanages in Udmurtia. The eldest, Hanna worked there; Taube and Sarah were fostered there. The sisters returned to Lithuania after the war, got married and lived a long life. As far as I know, only Sarah is still alive. She left for Israel with her family in the 1990s.

Father's second sister Sarah, born in 1889 also had a short life. Sarah was afflicted with tuberculosis since early childhood. It was strange that being so feeble she gave birth to three children. Sarah's husband, Gersh Shteintlef, was a painter. Sarah died in 1938, the same year when her sister Chaya Feige passed away, leaving three children behind: her daughters, Toybl and Esther, and her son Chaim. All of them perished in Kaunas ghetto [2](#) with their father.

The youngest daughter in the family, Reizl, born in 1895, was much more well-to-do than the others. She married a tailor named Alexandrovich, who provided for his children rather well. She had two sons. One of them was called Ruvim. I don't remember the other one's name. In 1936 Reizl gave birth to a daughter, who was named after her grandmother Leya. During the war nobody from Reizl's family survived – all of them perished in Kaunas ghetto.

The youngest in the family, Father's brother Michl, born in the 1900s, left for Palestine with his wife shortly before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. I don't remember his wife's name. Their children – two daughters and a son – were born in Israel. I cannot recall their names. I don't know what happened to the daughters. I only know that Michl's son perished during one of the wars in Israel in the 1960s. Michl died in the 1970s.

My father had very poor eye-sight since childhood. He was practically disabled. Nonetheless, he managed to finish cheder as Grandfather Yakob couldn't allow that his eldest son got no Jewish education. My father knew Yiddish, Hebrew and knew by heart several chapters of the Torah. There

was no chance that Father could go on with his education – neither from the physical standpoint, his eye-sight, nor from the material one, as Father was the eldest out of the children and had to start working as soon as possible in order to help out his parents. When he turned twelve, Grandfather bought him a small, but strong horse and Father became a cabman. He transported production items of the concrete plant, the owner of which, a Jew called Tipograf paid rather skimpy money. The production items were rather heavy: stairs flights, concrete slabs, well discs, and Father couldn't cope with loading or unloading them by himself. The most important thing is that he could barely see the road and couldn't handle the horse. That is why Father hired an assistant, who traveled with him and with whom he shared his skimpy earnings. Thus, Father earned his bread and butter in adolescence and when he was a married man with a wife and children.

My mother came from the small Lithuanian town of Zarasai, located about 100 km away from Vilnius. There her parents rented land for a long time, keeping a small farmstead with dairy farming. They made sour-cream, butter and cheese from the milk of their own cows and took it to the market to sell. My maternal grandmother died rather young. I never saw her. I don't even know her name. When she died, my grandfather Berl Idl Gar, born in the 1850s, married for the second time. His wife's name was Hanna. She was a kind Jewish lady. They didn't have their own children and Hanna treated her husband's children wonderfully, as well as loved and pampered her grandchildren. My mother deservedly considered her to be her second mother, and we also called her grandmother.

The eldest, Motle, born in 1880, left for America in 1914. He changed his name there and started calling himself Max. That was the way he signed his letters. He didn't write very often. Motl's fate was quite good. He became a businessman, got married and had children. I don't remember their names. Motl helped our family a lot in the prewar times; he sent parcels and money. In the postwar Soviet times it was dangerous to keep in touch with people from Capitalist countries [3](#), so we stopped corresponding with my uncle. I don't know what happened to Motl and his family. He died a long time ago, somewhere in the USA. My cousins and nephews are there. I would like to find them, but I have no time for it.

Dovid was the second in the family. He was born in the 1880s. Dovid and his family – his wife, whose name I cannot recall, and children lived in the small town of Krona near Vilnius. His family had a pretty good life. They owned a bakery, a bakery store and it yielded a pretty good income. In the late 1930s Dovid was struck with palsy and died before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, without seeing its atrocities.

The eldest daughter in the family, Chaya, left for Palestine in 1930. Her husband died shortly after that and Chaya married again. Her second husband was a Jew called Kaplan. They didn't have children. As a grown-up woman she adopted a girl and named her Chavira. Chaya died a long time ago. Chavira Kaplan and her large family are currently living in Israel.

Before the war Dovid's eldest son Joseph finished a Teachers' Training College and taught in Jewish schools in Lithuania. He turned out to be in Kaunas with his wife during the Great Patriotic War. Their daughter Getele was born in the ghetto, but the girl was very feeble and died shortly after the liberation. In 1945 Joseph and his wife left for the USA in order to forget what they had to go through and start a new life. He couldn't obliterate his experiences from his memory. Joseph wrote

a book about his life in the Kaunas ghetto. It was published in America with a huge circulation. Joseph died in 2003. The youngest in the family, Yankle, perished in occupation in Krona. There was no ghetto there, and Jews were executed during the first days of the war.

My mother, Mushe Ita Gar, was born in 1886. Before getting married, she lived with her parents, helped them about the house and took care of the cows. When Grandmother died, and Mother's brothers – Motl and Dovid – left home, my mother stayed with her father and his second wife. They didn't stay on the farmstead long. In 1909 my father proposed to my mother. Of course, old Jewish match-makers played their role. My parents wouldn't have met each other without them. Their wedding took place in Zarasai. My parents were wed under a chuppah in a local synagogue. They moved to Kaunas after the wedding. Grandfather Berl Idl bought them a tiny house on Grushevaya Street in Zelyonaya Gora. He and Hanna also moved there as it was hard for the two of them to take care of the farm without my mother. Since that time Berl Idl and Hanna lived with my parents. Grandfather died in 1919 and Hanna was buried in 1928.

### **Growing up**

In 1910 Mother gave birth to my elder sister Hanna and in 1913 Rochl was born. On 14th December 1914 I came into the world. I was called Toybe-Rivke. My parents dreamt of a son and fate sent them two. In 1917 Efraim was born in and in 1920 the youngest son was born and named after Grandfather Berl Idl, who had just passed away.

We were very poor. Our small house on Grushevaya Street consisted of two rooms: one rather large room, which served for the entire family as a drawing-room and a bed-room, and a kitchen with a big stove. There was hardly any furniture: there was a big round table, a bed where my parents slept and a small cot taken by Hanna, whom we loved dearly. We, the children, slept where we could think of. Some of us slept on the boards, other ones on two chairs put together or on the floor on sacks stuffed with hay. There wasn't enough bed-linen for everybody, so we used our clothes. I always shared one mattress with my younger sister Hanna.

Our food was also scarce. During the week Mother cooked thick potato soup with onion for everybody to fill up their stomachs. It was easy to stop the hunger with that, but low-calorie food didn't quench hunger for a long time: we were hungry before soon. There was meat on the table as well. One of my mother's friends kept a butchery store. She was sorry for us and sold my mother small pieces of meat dirt cheap and Mother managed to concoct something out of it for all of us. She knew how to cook things almost out of nothing. She cooked tasty latkes, knejdlakh. We had chicken broth only on holidays. Grandmother Hanna daily went to the charity Jewish canteen, where the poor were given some food. She brought thin soup or porridge from there. It was also helping our family. Nonetheless, we didn't starve. Mother knew how to calculate the ration in such a way that we always had something to eat, be it even the simplest food.

Apart from food, it was also necessary to save money to get fodder for the horse as it was our only source of income. Father, a very frugal man, made a small box, with the help of which he measured oats for the horse, so it wouldn't eat more than needed. We loved our sweet horse and stealthily gave it handful of oats. The horse knew us and always stretched towards us, touching us with her mouth and wet warm muzzle. That horse was the only entertainment and a toy for me ever since my earliest childhood. All of us had hand-me-downs passing from one to another. Mother knew how to remake and remodel old things like a true milliner.

We began every morning with a prayer. I still remember its words. All of us thanked God for having awakened and started a new day. Every morning Father went to the synagogue, which wasn't far from our house. It was a small two-storied synagogue, where women prayed on the second floor. Mother and Grandmother Hanna often went there. In spite of living in one room, I never saw my father with his head uncovered. Mother and Hanna always wore kerchiefs on their heads: dark ones during the week and starched white ones on Fridays and on holidays.

Usually we had bread for breakfast. Sometimes butter was served with it. Dinner was as modest. The kashrut was strictly observed at home. We didn't have a lot of dishes. They were very old, mended many times, but dairy and meat dishes were kept separate beginning from a pot and up to the cutting board and knives. Mother got ready for Sabbath beforehand. She tried to stash a little bit of money away by Saturday to celebrate it worthily. On Friday Mother baked two challot from the flour of the highest sort, cleaned the room and oven. We were looking forward to seeing our father. Upon return from the synagogue he said a prayer and the meal started. It was also very modest, but still it differed from our daily food. Beside challah, my mother also baked small rolls, one for each member of the family. Sometimes she cooked tsimes, made stewed fruit in the summer. Chulent was one of the mandatory dishes. There was very little meat, but Mother still managed to make it really scrumptious. Chulent was kept in the bakery nearby, where all our neighbors brought their Sabbath chulent.

My parents got ready for the Jewish holidays in advance, Father saved every kopeck he could in order to celebrate Jewish holidays in accordance with traditions. Grandfather Yakob gave our family three litas [Lithuanian currency] for every holiday. At that time it was a lot of money. Owing to that money and our savings we could celebrate holidays. There was always fish on Rosh Hashanah. If there wasn't enough money for vegetables and spices, my mother cooked gefilte fish. If the year wasn't good, she made the so-called empty fish, but it was also cooked with vegetables.

On Yom Kippur my mother bought everybody poultry for the rite of kapores: girls were given hens and sons roosters. We went to the synagogue, to a shochet, who would twirl the poultry over our head and read the prayers. I still remember that prayer. Then he cut the poultry and we took it home. Mother cooked some fatty broth and made kneidlakh. It was a real feast for us. She baked special buns for Yom Kippur. Sukkot came next. Father made a sukkah himself. He did it in a very original way. He put fir branches in front of the entrance to the yard and that way people came there right through the entrance. Mother put a small table there, a candle stick and my father had meals and prayed there during the entire holiday period. We ran into the sukkah thinking that it was a game.

For the holiday of Simchat Torah my brother and I bought multi-colored small flags made of cardboard, and put a potato on the top of flags. We took them to the synagogue. It was fun for us. We took part in the procession, danced and sang with the adults. It was a great merry holiday. All of us had a good time.

We always looked forward to Chanukkah. Grandfather Yakob gave the children Chanukkah gelt: 20 cents each. It was a lot of money for us. I usually bought a roll and a glass of carbonated water. I ate the tidbit slowly, in small pieces. Every evening at home a new candle was lit on the chanukkiyah. There were potato latkes on the table. My mother was a very good cook. Mother always had some flour and poppy seeds in store for the holiday of Purim. She baked wonderful

hamantashen. We lived from hand to mouth and Pesach in a month required a lot of money so Mother reckoned that each member of the family should get only one. I ate mine rather quickly and hungered for another one. There were years when Mother could make two pies for each of us, and it was a very great joy for us. Every time each of us got equal portions as our mother loved all of us equally. We didn't bring shelakhmones to friends and relatives, as we couldn't afford it.

After Purim everybody was looking forward to the big holiday, Pesach. Father bought matzah way in advance. He brewed honey beer long before the holiday. He poured it in bottles and covered them with a special gadget. I still keep that gadget. It is very dear to me for the sake of the memory. Mother took care of the cleaning and all the dishes were scoured and koshered. We had separate table dishes for Pesach. Every year I and my younger brothers were looking forward to seeing our mother open a cherished chest, where cups for all the members of our family were kept. Our parents had tiny golden ones and the rest of us had silver and tin ones. Later I was asking myself why my parents wouldn't sell their golden dishes in hard times. I found the answer to that question. Jewish traditions were sacred to them and besides the golden cups were given to them by their parents and they would never let them go no matter what.

On the eve of Pesach my father walked around the house taking away any chametz. The remnants of leavened bread were burnt by him in the yard. On seder he was at the head of the table, reclining on a pillow. He hid three pieces of matzah and we had to find that afikoman and got a present. The gift was rather conventional in our family, but we gladly stuck to that tradition. One of my brothers usually asked the four questions about the origin of the holiday. Father read the Hagaddah. Everything happened in accordance with Jewish law. There were all obligatory dishes on the table: eggs, potato, bitter herbs etc. At the best time we had gefilte fish, but it was a real delicacy for us. Mother cooked traditional Jewish dishes: imberlakh, all kinds of tsimes. Of course, all of us ate chicken, broth, matzah kneidl during the Paschal period. In general, the celebration of this holiday in our family wasn't worse than with other Jews, our neighbors. It made our father happy. Mother made very tasty curds dishes on the summer holiday of Shavuot: pancakes and casseroles.

There was a Jewish public kindergarten not far from our house. It was for poor children. My elder sisters went there. I had to go there as well. We were given modest food there, but it was good. That kindergarten was funded by the charitable donations of rich Jews. We were taught Jewish traditions, we sang songs in Yiddish and danced. In general we spent the time the way it was proper for children. Though, we weren't put to bed as the premises were too small to put beds in. I went to the first grade of a Jewish elementary school after kindergarten. It was some type of pre-school, where the studies lasted for one year. I will always remember my teacher Rainits from that school. I cannot recall her name since we always called her Ms. Rainits. She loved and cherished the children.

After elementary school I went to the second grade of the Jewish school. Our director Meishe Livshin taught Mathematics. He was a very strict and demanding teacher. Everybody sat still in his class. I preferred Arts. I liked literature. We studied the classics of Jewish literature. I was a mediocre student, but I was active, took part in amateur contests. I loved performances. Most of all I liked the scenes from the plays written by Sholem Aleichem [4](#), which we staged for the holidays. The students' parents came to watch them, but mine came very rarely. They were very busy, Father at work, and Mother at home. Not only children of the poor went to this school, but also the



representatives of different strata of society. There was a democratic air at our school. Everybody communicated with each other and was friendly to each other without considering the social position.

I knew about the existence of Zionist [5](#) youth organizations. There was Maccabi and some other organizations in Kaunas. I didn't feel like going there. There were other stronger tendencies at our school, namely the Communist ones. There was a free Socialist organization. When I was eleven, I became an underground pioneer [6](#) and took an interest in Communist ideas. My sisters joined a Communist underground organization before me. First, my brothers were fond of Zionist ideas and joined Hashomer Hatzair [7](#). Then they followed our movement. We didn't have pioneer scarves [Pioneers wore red scarves]. We were called 'pioneers without scarves.' We were involved in propaganda: spread slogans, distributed flyers praising the Soviet regime, made red flags, wrote slogans on them and then hung up them up at night. We were regularly involved in political enlightenment, read the works written by the classics of Marxism and Leninism.

There was an underground press. Small dirt cheap books were published in Yiddish, covering the biographies of great people – Lenin [8](#) and his brothers-in-arms. We spread that literature and gave it to people in the street or placed it stealthily in the houses of people. We became atheists, against all religions. At home we weren't brave enough to stand up openly against Jewish traditions; besides, we loved our parents and knew how important it was for them. Once, my mother asked us to wash up, and my sister and I mixed meat and dairy dishes. Having seen that my mother said that it was a sin against God and my sister and I were ashamed. Being pioneers, then Komsomol members, [9](#), we still celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays with our parents, for them to be pleased by that and to feel calm. We expressed our protest against religion after the holiday. We bought pork sausages, pig's fat and got together to eat that banned non-kosher food. Luckily, my parents didn't find out about it; violation of traditions would have been a big blow for them.

There were Communist leaders in our organization. I cannot recall their names now. As a rule, they were school teachers. Headmaster Livshin was against that organization as he understood that the school would be threatened with closure as the Communist Party was banned and its leaders were detained and imprisoned. In the late 1920s Smetona [10](#) came to power in Lithuania, and all political organizations were closed down, there was a reaction in the country. Livshin told us many times to cease that underground activity and do what we had to: study. We wouldn't listen to him. In 1929 his fears came true – our school was closed down. Some students, children of rich parents, were transferred to other schools, mostly to the Commercial Lyceum. Most people found a job. I understood that I couldn't go on with my studies. My family couldn't afford the tuition fee. It was clear to me that my childhood was over and I had to work and help my parents. I became an apprentice of the tailor Lind. He was a very good tailor. He had his own atelier and many apprentices.

The organization had got stronger by that time. We became Komsomol members and kept on with our underground work. I performed ideological work with my colleagues – apprentices and some of them also joined the underground organization. I became the leader of the Komsomol group at the age of fifteen. During Smetona's reign some of our leaders were arrested, but we kept on working. Our organization originally consisted of Jewish youth as during Smetona's regime anti-Semitism was common and young people tried to find a way out. Then Lithuanians began joining our

organization. Every weekend we went for a picnic out of town. On Saturday, on our day off, the Jewish youth got together and on Sunday Russians and Lithuanians did. We read revolutionary papers and other press from the USSR, sang songs. Besides, we played different games: some people role played workers and others policemen. Workers organized demonstrations, and policemen chased them with clubs. That way we worked on the tactics of street fight. The interesting thing is that none of the underground members was willing to play the part of policeman. During the casting people had tough arguments. My group counted more than one hundred people.

In spring 1933 arrests commenced: either somebody gave us away or our jaunts attracted too much attention. Our house was searched. Nothing was found at my place due to my neatness and discretion. I was arrested and taken to the police quarters, where I met a lot of my friends. It was my first arrest, so I got away with an administrative punishment. I was exiled without a trial. All of us were exiled to different places so as not to create conditions for us to continue our underground activity. I came to a small town. I was hired as a housekeeper by a family of Jewish pharmacists. I lived at their place, helped them with work about the house. In general, it was a pretty good place. Though, I wasn't allowed to leave the town and had to check in at the police station every week. Local citizens treated me with respect and I, of course, I didn't chuck away the chance to popularize the Soviet regime. I wrote home every week and got letters from my parents where I was asked to calm down and not to get involved in any dangerous matters.

Hanna was arrested the same year. She carried a red flag at some of the demonstrations. She was savagely beaten while being arrested. There was a trial. First, she was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment, but taking into account her young age, her sentence was changed to six years. Hanna's first incarceration was in Kaunas, then she was moved to the prison in Bayura. My poor mother spent so many nights crying, thinking of her daughters. At that time we didn't understand her grief and kept on getting involved in underground work.

In 1934 my exile was over and I came back to Kaunas. Straight upon my return, I became a member of the underground Communist Party and zealously started working. There was a boom of revolutionary movement in that period of time as Fascists came to power in Germany and we were aware what kind of dreadful prospects it could bring to us. Our hopes were with the Soviet Union. We knew something about arrests and repressions [11](#) over there, but our sincere beliefs in the politics of the USSR and Stalin were so strong that we truly considered all those arrests to be fair. We continued our propaganda, taking any chance to stand up against Smetona's regime.

In 1936 a terrible thing happened in Kaunas. A Lithuanian worker was driven to despair by the factory owner - a capitalist, who exploited him. He killed the owner and himself. All of us went out to a demonstration. We were dispersed and arrested right in the street. This time there was a trial and I was sentenced to three years of imprisonment. I was sent to the political prison. This prison was a high-security prison. We weren't fed too poorly. At any rate it was better than what I could get at home. There were a lot of like-minded people there. We talked about the bright future and our struggle all nights long. In the afternoon we worked in the garden: we dug potatoes.

Three months had passed like one and I came back home. In 1937 and in 1938 I was arrested again. I was arrested seven times before the Soviet regime [Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [12](#) came to power. In 1938 I was sent to the concentration camp in Dimitrav by administrative means.



It was a very hard arrest. We worked in a quarry, breaking the stones with a heavy peck. Time flew by so fast for us, we were carried away with an idea. We looked towards the east with hope, anticipating the Soviet regime.

### **The Soviet invasion of the Baltics**

In summer 1940 I was exiled to Onuskis [30 km from Vilnius]. Of course, I had things to do when I was in exile. I even managed to establish a Communist group. We held demonstrations against the Smetona regime. Here in Onushkis, I found out that the Red Army came to Lithuania. We were delighted by the event and went out with the welcoming slogans. There was a lot of work apart from that: we had to organize accommodation for the Soviet military. I was eager to do that and organized accommodation for the Soviet soldiers. We were so happy to see them. We held them tight. In a while I came back home. Here I was met by my friends and family. My sister Hanna was set free from imprisonment. She worked in the nationalization committee, dealing with expropriation of the property of the rich and capitalists. I was appointed to the editors' department of the Jewish paper *Dir Enes - Pravda*. That paper was published illegally before the Soviets came. Now it became the leading Yiddish Communist press for the Jewish population of Lithuania. I was often on business trips and collected materials for my articles.

We had a wonderful life. We lived to see things that we'd been waiting for for years. The power in Lithuania belonged to the poor. It was an overall euphoria. We went to the cinema, enthusiastically watched Soviet movies, walked in the parks and squares of our native town. My sister Hanna got married. Her husband Fyodor Filimonov was Russian, and my parents didn't object to their marriage. Rochl was also married. She married a local Jew, Alter Kannenman, and in 1939 their daughter Zelda was born.

I also started noticing pleasant young people. One of them had been my friend since my school years. He became the closest person to me. Gutman Shmerkovich was born in 1916. Gutman came from a very poor family. His father, a craftsman, had died a long time ago, and his mother Leya worked in our school as a janitor. Gutman's eldest brother, Iliia Shmerkovich, was exiled from the country for his Communist activity. He lived in Argentine. He was a headmaster of a Jewish school there. Iliiah had two daughters – Kunya and Catalina. Before the war Iliiah wrote letters and when it became impossible to keep in touch with relatives abroad we stopped corresponding, so I don't know anything about his fate.

Gutman had an elder sister, Chaya. Her husband – I can't recall his name – was an underground Communist. In 1933 he fled with his family to the USSR in order to avoid persecution. He was arrested on the border with the Soviet Union for being a spy and then executed. Chaya and Maria were exiled to Kyrgyzstan in accordance with article 58. [It was provided by this article that any action directed at upheaval, shattering and weakening of the power of the working and peasant class should be punished.] She got married for the second time and took her husband's name – Kantorovich and changed her daughter's name to that as well for her not to have any trouble because of her father. Consequently Maria's father was rehabilitated [13](#). Chaya died in the 1980s. Maria Kantorovich lives in Israel. Gutman's younger sister Riva was married and had two daughters – Rosa and Gita, born one after another. Gutman's brother Itshak was also an underground Communist. Gutman and he composed wonderful verses, which were published in Jewish papers.

### **During the war**

Gutman proposed to me and on 31st December 1940 we got our marriage registered in the marriage registry office. My parents didn't even insist on a Jewish wedding as they clearly understood that we would be against it, so they let us do as we wished. My husband and I moved into our house. We were given a corner in the drawing-room. Our nook was behind a partition. Gutman was loved by my parents and my mother literally adored him. Soon I got pregnant, but I didn't stop working. In mid-June 1941 I went on a business trip to take care of the problems of the local Rokiskis newspaper [about 150 km from Vilnius]. I felt anxious and there were talks that German troops were deployed at the border. Late in the evening on 21st June I came back to Kaunas. At 4am the war broke out.

My husband and I went to the district Party Committee at once. All Communists got together to resist the enemy. Hanna's husband Fyodor was being trained in the army at the time. Hanna told me to stay at home as how could I go in my condition! I replied, 'I will join!' There were buses near the regional committee. They were ready for evacuation of party activists. The three of us - I, Gutman and Hanna - took one of the buses. We thought our trip would last for about three days until the Red Army would defeat the enemy and banish the Fascists. We didn't say goodbye to our parents, sister Rochl and brothers. On our way the Fascists were close on our heels. We passed through Latvia and reached the former border with the USSR. Here we took trains and went through the huge territory of Russia. We met our brother Berl Idl on our way and found out that our parents, sister and brothers had managed to leave Kaunas on a horsed cart. Berl Idl joined a group of young people and got evacuated with them.

We were on the road for about three weeks. We were fed porridge; sometimes we were given some gruel and bread. Thus, we reached the town of Slobodskoye in Kirov oblast [about 1000 km from Moscow]. We moved into the apartment of some local people. It was hard. We starved. We had stayed in Slobodskoye for a while and then my husband found a job as a journalist with the paper of the neighboring town Nagorsk. We moved there. My time to give birth was getting close, and there was a good hospital in Nagorsk. I didn't feel very well during the last weeks of my pregnancy. The labor was hard. I lost a lot of blood. I was infected. I was in a delirium for over a month. My husband and sister carried me in their arms like a child. Hanna became like a second mother to my daughter. I called her Lena after Vladimir Ilich Lenin.

My dear baby daughter was famished from the first days of her life. I starved and I didn't have milk. It was hard for us to nurture the baby. Gutman was willing to go in the lines. He wanted to fight the Fascists, besides he would be able to send me his certificate. At first, Lithuanians were not drafted into the army. As soon as my husband found out about the formation of the Lithuanian division [14](#), he said goodbye to us and left for Balahna, where the division was being formed. It was early 1942. We got to know that the Lithuanian government, which was evacuated to Kazan, founded an orphanage for Lithuanian children, who remained without parents. There were Lithuanian children there, who at the beginning of the war happened to be in the pioneer camp in Palanga. Some children were rescued and the rest became first foster children of the orphanage. It was located not far from us, in the town of Konstantinovo, Kirov oblast.

Hanna, Lena and I moved to Konstantinovo, where my sister and I were given a job as mentors in the orphanage. By that time we found out that my parents were in Udmurtia. Soon they joined us in Konstantinovo. My husband wrote heart-breaking letters, full of love. He was in a training unit of the 16th Lithuanian division, and then he was deployed deep in the front, in the vicinity of Orel,

where the huge Kursk battle [15](#) took place. Fyodor Filimonov, Hanna's husband and my brothers were also in that division. My husband and Fyodor survived that battle. All of the other Jewish guys were killed in action. Unfortunately, both of my brothers, Efraim and Berl Idl Gershenovich, were killed in action in that brave battle. When we were notified of the death of our brothers, my mother started getting sick. My parents tried to stick to Jewish traditions, even in evacuation. Every morning they prayed for us, our children and husbands.

We lived in a small room in the orphanage. It seemed to us that starvation and cold would never end. Of course, Lenchka was given food in the orphanage. I also had some meals. The food was scarce, but we didn't starve. The children lacked fat, meat, fruits and vegetables, but they always had their portion of porridge and soup. However, it wasn't like that for everybody. The management of the orphanage purchased meat, chickens, ducks, sausages and ham for themselves and their children. It was covered with ice and stored in the fridges in the shed. The children of the management weren't ashamed of anybody. They ate chicken and teased everybody showing tidbits to other children. I am ashamed to recollect such things, that it was a sad bitter truth.

My mother starved, we didn't get enough gray bread with our food cards [16](#). Once, I was in despair and took some of the thin soup to my mother. Those managers, who were stuffing their kids with chicken meat, were informed of that. There was a terrible scandal. I was threatened with losing my job and being turned out in the street. My mother couldn't overcome the grief after her sons' death. She died from starvation in winter 1943. She was buried at the municipal cemetery. It was hard to dig the burial hole for her as the ground was frozen. Father observed the shivah and read a prayer. In general he tried to observe Jewish traditions.

### **After the war**

When my mother died, Father went to stay with Rochl, who lived in Tartar SSR. As soon as Lithuania was liberated, Hanna was called there to be a manager of Party nationalized assets. Soon my father also came there. My daughter and I stayed in Konstantinovo till December 1944 until the entire orphanage was re-evacuated. It was a long trip. Everybody had his seat on the train. In general, our way home differed from the trip when we ran away from Lithuania in 1941. When we came back to Kaunas, it turned out that my daughter and I had no place to live. Hanna and her husband Fyodor moved to Vilnius. They didn't have children. Rochl, Alter and Zelda also settled in a poky room.

Our house in Zelyonaya Gora wasn't destroyed. It was occupied by a Lithuanian. She moved from Viliampol. Father got settled there as well and he waited for that Lithuanian to vacate it. I was offered a job to be in charge of the Jewish kindergarten. It was established under the auspice of the Jewish orphanage. I went to work in the kindergarten and occupied a poky room on the premises with my daughter. It was hard work as I had never held an administrative job before. I had no other way out as I had no place to live. By that time our house in Zelyonaya Gora was unoccupied, but I couldn't live there as it took me too much time to get to work. We had no right to live in the kindergarten. In accordance with the law I wasn't entitled to live on the premises of the kindergarten and some commission had my daughter and me leave the place. I was in despair.

At that time I bumped into my cousin Joseph Gar, and he suggested that we should move into his place. We lived with Joseph for a couple of months. In 1945 Joseph and his wife decided to leave for

Poland. Joseph and his wife, who went through the ghetto and concentration camp, couldn't forget their daughter Getele, who was born in the ghetto and died a couple of days after the liberation. They hoped to turn a new leaf in another country. I had to leave his apartment, as in accordance with the legislation if the apartment had no owner, the property was transferred to the state. So, we lived on orphanage premises again.

The kindergarten was in the same house where the Jewish orphanage was, on Kestuchio Street. The Jewish community, founded upon liberation, was also located there. The orphanage and kindergarten were under the aegis of the Jewish community. Many Jews helped out the best way they could. There were orphans in the kindergarten, who lost parents and felt the horrors of war in early childhood. Rebelskiy, the colonel of the Soviet Army was the one who provided most of the assistance. Using his connections and acquaintances, he went to different organizations for them to provide financial assistance to our orphanage. He got food products for the children. He brought the cow, which was kept in the shed in the rear yard. So the children had milk. They loved it, their 'wet-nurse.' Rebelskiy also brought linen, mattresses, pillows, quilts to the kindergarten. Before that the children used anything they could find as bed cover. The state didn't have time and money to take care of the Jewish orphanage. We hardly got anything from our regime. Rebelskiy gave a set of linen to me. So my daughter and I had something to sleep on.

Rebelskiy helped the orphanage for a couple of years. Later, in 1948, with the outbreak of Stalin's repressions against Jews [17](#), he was arrested and declared an enemy of the people [18](#). Rebelskiy vanished into thin air. He was most likely executed by the NKVD [19](#) in the early 1950s.

Being employed by the Jewish orphanage, I witnessed many dramas which were the consequence of war. I remember that one common Lithuanian woman brought in a Jewish boy. She rescued him, by hiding him at her place during the occupation. She put her life at risk. After the war, when there was a food card system, the woman had to take the boy here in order to rescue him as at that time many people were starving. She had nothing to feed the boy with, so she brought him here. She tried to talk him into staying here, convincing him that he was a Jew and had to stay in the orphanage for the Jews. The boy was sobbing, hanging at the woman's skirt and crying that he didn't want to be a Jew, but to stay with her. That Lithuanian forced him into staying and left. She never came here again. Soon that boy Shmulik Aronson, got used to us, loved the orphanage and forgot his rescuer. In a while some of his distant relatives came and got him.

During the war one of our teacher's wife perished and their daughter was rescued by a Lithuanian. When he came back from the evacuation, he took much effort in finding his child, and he succeeded. He found his daughter with that lady. When he came to get his daughter, she didn't want to come with him. She was a baby at the beginning of the war and didn't remember her father. Besides, the Lithuanian lady wasn't willing to give up the child. Then he kidnapped the baby. The woman turned to the militia. The man was arrested and the child was returned to her. He had to resort to the court, and by a court ruling the child was to stay with the father. The girl couldn't get over the separation with the Lithuanian, who had saved her, but finally she got used to her father. There were a lot of such sad stories. I took it personally and could share those things only with my friends, Riva and Taube, who also lived at the orphanage.

In early 1946 my husband Gutman was demobilized. I was so happy to see him again. Towards the end of the war he served in the summer unit of the Lithuanian division, which was located in the

Romanian town of Constanta. Gutman was involved in technical maintenance of aircraft. Upon arrival in Kaunas, Gutman found out that his loved ones had perished in occupation. His mother Leya was executed during the first big action in Kaunas ghetto. His sister Riva, not having found her daughters Rozele and Gitele, who were taken away during the action against children, surrendered for an execution. My husband's favorite brother, Itshak Shmerkovich, a talented Jewish poet, lived to see the liberation. He was very exhausted and famished. On the first day when he ate a lot of food, he died from volvulus. Gutman took the death of his kin really hard. My daughter and I were the only joy he had.

Upon our return we moved into our apartment. We rented a dark room in an old house. In October 1946 I gave birth to a son and called him Ilia - my husband's brother's name also began with an 'I'. Our life was getting gradually better. Gutman found a job. First he was a staff journalist, then he became the director of the Communist paper 'Communism Banner'. It was a party paper, meant for the denizens of rural areas. My husband worked really hard, went on frequent trips. Right upon his return, we addressed the municipal Ispolkom [20](#) with the request to provide us with an apartment. First, we were given a room in a communal apartment [21](#) on Donelavichus Street. We lived there for two years. Then we received a small isolated apartment on Laivess Lane [in Soviet time that central street was called Stalin avenue]. We celebrated New Year 1959 in our new apartment. I am still living in that apartment. The house on Nemanas Street was built for party activists and leaders. Part of the apartments was given to people like us, former underground members. We got a wonderful three-room apartment.

The first postwar years were hard on us. I kept on working at the kindergarten. I came back to work right after Ilia was born. The boy was feeble and he couldn't go to a nursery, so we hired a baby-sitter. A Lithuanian peasant girl, Aldona, started living with us. These were the times of starvation and our scarce food cards were to be shared with five people. I was used to famine, but I was so sorry for my children!

My father, whom I loved very much, was very sick. He turned blind when he was about to die. Nonetheless, he was a very independent man. He didn't want to live with me, or with his synagogue. We were active Communists at that time and didn't understand our father. My daughter Lena loved her grandfather very much. She often called on him, took him to the synagogue. Father died in 1948. We invited an old Jew to read a prayer over the dead, though at that time it was fraught with danger and trouble for us, the Communists. I took my father's death very hard.

As they say, when it rains, it pours. It was the time when state anti-Semitic campaigns commenced. Luckily they didn't affect my husband: he kept on working as he was a respectable man. The Jewish orphanage became a target. It was constantly criticized. We had commissions and audits. They did their best in order to destroy the Jewish kindergarten. By that time the Jewish school had been closed down. They sent non-Jewish employees and foster children there - Russians and Lithuanians in order to pursue assimilation. But they didn't think that would do. In 1952 when the Doctors' Plot [22](#) rang out in the country, I was charged with poisoning a Lithuanian boy. Good thing, my husband insisted that I should quit my job, so that I wasn't sued. It was a deep personal tragedy. I exerted my every effort at work and was very dedicated to children. My husband helped me find a job in a republican library. I was well accepted by the team. I worked there until retirement.



In spite of the things going on in the country, my husband and I sincerely believed in Communist ideas, thinking that all those events were caused by people on the ground. We raised our children in the spirit of dedication to Lenin's ideas and Stalin. I think there wasn't any other family, which would spend so much time with children, having conversations about the leaders and Communism. We told them about our underground activity. We took them to the museums, showed them the jails, where we were detained. There was my picture in the jail among other inmates. We mostly spoke Russian, sometimes Lithuanian at home. The Jewish language was rarely spoken by us.

Stalin's death in 1953 was a personal tragedy for us. I cried all night long and woke the children up with my sobbing. On the day of the funeral we came to Stalin Avenue with crape bands. There was no traffic in the street, the city was imbued with the mourning honks of cars. The XX Party Congress [23](#) was like a bolt of lightning amidst blue skies, as well as Nikita Khrushchev's speech [24](#), where he revealed Stalin's cult of personality. We couldn't believe that as all our ideals were shattered. I remember one night when Stalin's monument was dismantled in Vilnius central square. On the way to work everybody was shocked that the square was empty. It was horrible. However, my husband and I found the strength to understand and correctly assess what was going on. The fact that Stalin turned out to be an enemy, didn't diminish the attractiveness of Communist ideas. We were still members of the Party. At that time I wasn't involved in social life, but my husband was an active party member.

Our family treated Israel in accordance with the propaganda in the Soviet press. We read the papers and believed the things written there. Even in the years when Israel was at war, we took the information the way it was covered by the Soviet propaganda: where Israel was a malefactor and a horrible aggressor, having attacked helpless Arabs. We didn't dare express our judgment on Israel in front of our children, trying not to focus their attention on that. There was no way we could immigrate to that country. We lived modestly. We didn't have a car. We enjoyed no riches. In the 1970s we got a tiny plot of land, and tilled it the best way we could [25](#). Here we used to spend our summer vacations with our children.

I devoted a lot of time to my children. First, Lena went to a Jewish school. Soon it was closed down. She went to a Russian school, and finished it successfully. I plied my daughter with love for books and she decided to follow into my footsteps. Lena entered Vilnius University, the extramural library department. However, the teaching in Lithuanian turned out to be hard for Lena and soon she was transferred to the library department of the Leningrad institute, which she successfully finished. Lena married a Russian man, Gennadiy Grigoriev. He was a military, demobilized in Kaunas. Lena and her husband traveled all over the huge former Soviet Union. She lived in many cities of Lithuania, as well as in Odessa and Nikolayev. In 1975 Lena's daughter Natasha [Natalia] was born. The girl had asthma and some doctors recommended that the climate should be changed. Gennadiy was assigned to Blagoveschensk [about 7000 km from Moscow]. My daughter's family hasn't left the Far East since that time. Natasha gave birth to her son Vadim in 1995 and Maxim in 1996. My daughter is a happy mother and grandmother. She often comes over to help me.

My son finished a Russian school, where Lena had also been studying. Upon finishing it, he entered the Vilnius Polytechnic Institute and graduated from the sanitary faculty. Ilia married a Lithuanian when he was a student. Thus, our family happens to be international. In 1970 Alina gave birth to a daughter, Diana. Diana married a Lithuanian, Deinis, and left for Germany in the 1990s. My great-grandchildren were born there: a boy, Karolis, and a girl, Camilla. Ilia's younger daughter Laura was



born in 1986. She is currently studying at the Polytechnic Institute. In 1994 my dear son suddenly died at the age of 48. He had an extensive heart attack. It was a great sorrow.

My husband and I took the events related with the separation of Lithuania from the USSR very hard. Lithuania gained its independence in 1991 [26](#). Our adolescence ideals were crushed. The ideals we had devoted our youth and lives to were crushed. Since 1991 Gutman has been in a deep depression and it was aggravated by another sorrow: his son's death. Gutman was getting sick and four years after Ilia's death he passed away – on the same day his son had died.

I have been on my own since that time. My sisters' husbands, Fyodor Filimonov and Alter Kannenman, died a long time ago. In 1995 Rochl, being of a senile age, finally agreed to Zelda's constant invitations and left for Israel. She died there in 2000. Hanna was very ill. She was afflicted with Alzheimer disease. When Gutman died, I took her to my place and looked after her until she died in 2002. Thanks to my sister, I found out about the Kaunas Jewish community. It was the only positive consequence of the independence of Lithuania that Jews obtained their own community and reestablished Jewish community life.

I, who had never celebrated Jewish holidays and had never observed traditions, felt joy when the traditions were revived. I celebrate Sabbath and go to the community when I physically can. Recently the Jewish fall holidays were celebrated in the community, and I participated in celebrations along with other Jews in the Kaunas synagogue. I involuntarily recalled a prayer, taught by my father, the rites, the Hebrew words I hadn't used for years. I get assistance from the community, and I'm grateful to those who are providing it for me.

The employees of the library, where I had worked for over 20 years, often come to see me. In spite of my being the only Jew there, they loved me. They are still inviting me to attend all their events. Recently I was invited to go to the cathedral, where the service had been ordered to commemorate all the deceased employees. I couldn't attend as I felt rather unwell on that day. But still, my life wasn't futile. People have always been nice to me. I raised two wonderful children. My daughter is the closest person to me. She comes from the Far East rather often. To my regret, I saw her children only once in my lifetime. Alina, my daughter-in-law, also treats me kindly. I would like to have a longer life, in spite of getting senile.

## **Glossary:**

### **[1](#) 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.

### **[2](#) Kaunas ghetto**

On 24th June 1941 the Germans captured Kaunas. Two ghettos were established in the city, a

small and a big one, and 48,000 Jews were taken there. Within two and a half months the small ghetto was eliminated and during the 'Grossaktion' of 28th-29th October, thousands of the survivors were murdered, including children. The remaining 17,412 people in the big ghetto were mobilized to work. On 27th-28th March 1944 another 18,000 were killed and 4,000 were taken to different camps in July before the Soviet Army captured the city. The total number of people who perished in the Kaunas ghetto was 35,000.

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

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

### **4 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.

### **5 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

### **6 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts 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.

### **7 Hashomer Hatzair**

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe,

Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

## **8 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.

## **9 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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 as uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **10 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.

## **11 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.

## **12 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.

### **13 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.

### **14 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 Belarussian 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.

### **15 Kursk battle**

The greatest tank battle in the history of World War II, which began on 5th July 1943 and ended eight days later. The biggest tank fight, involving almost 1,200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides, took place in Prokhorovka on 12th July and ended with the defeat of the German tank unit.

### **16 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.

## **17 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'.

## **18 Enemy of the people**

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

## **19 NKVD**

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

## **20 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.

## **21 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **22 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.

### **23 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.

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

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

### **25 Dacha**

country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

### **26 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.