

# Vladimir Rabinovich

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Riga

Latvia

Interviewer: Svetlana Kovalchuk

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In 1976, my father, Isaak Moiseevich Rabinovich, made a sketch of his paternal family tree. His family took root in Kraslava [(265 km from Riga)], in east Latvia. The family settled there at the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th century, when Zalman Rabinovich was invited to become the local rabbi. According to some family legends, he had been living in Odessa [(today in Ukraine)] before that.

By the middle of the 19th century, two sons of Zalman Rabinovich lived in Kraslava - Abram-Tuvia [(Tobias)] and Samuil. That was the time of the progressive Jewish movement known as Haskalah. Both sons were extremely devoted to education, knowledge and the study of secular sciences. They no longer adhered to traditional Jewish religion. However, they observed all community norms and rules to a certain extent. Samuil was the more- educated of the brothers. He vigorously studied the Russian language, civil rules and legal standards, especially property issues. There is no information confirming that he studied in any special educational institutions. He seems to have passed examinations and become a private attorney, and in at the end of the 1870s or the beginning of the 1880s, he became a representative of a private financial establishment in Kraslava called the Russian Insurance Company. He represented that company on all kinds of insurance activity issues. He was extremely proud of his position. And for his honest, zealous service in that company, he was awarded honorary diplomas and service badges. One badge marked his 20th anniversary in service, and another, the 25th. The badges say he began working for the company in 1887.

All these family relics were kept by my father's cousin in Leningrad, who was very devoted to family traditions. In our uneasy century, she managed to keep them, and gave them to me.

Kraslava was Count Plater's family estate. The Platers attracted Jews to the area, both for trade and for crafts. They treated Jews very well and were very liberal. It seems that Zalman Rabinovich received the invitation to come to Kraslava from the Platers. Samuil was on rather good terms with Count Plater in his insurance and legal business and used to carry out various assignments for him. Count Plater gave Samuil a signet ring, which I have now, for his service in the Russian Insurance Company.

Samuil and Tobias were successful, and the local Jewish community wanted large payments from them to help support the community. There were a lot of needy people in Kraslava who wanted their financial support. But the brothers considered it burdensome. With the help of friends, their family left the Kraslava Jewish religious community and formed their own religious community, as was typical and widespread in those times. It was a small community, which entered Kraslava history under this very name. Within the family, they were focused on knowledge, education - all

progressive and advanced tendencies in the European and Russian science.

Samuil Rabinovich is my great-grandfather on my mother's side. The marriage of my grandfather and my grandmother was a marriage between family members. Both brothers - Tobias and Samuil - are my great-grandfathers. Tobias's son, my grandfather, Moisei Rabinovich, married his cousin Masha Rabinovich, Samuil's daughter. Tobias, as far as I know, had various trade enterprises in Kraslava. Owing to the family's immersion in Russian culture, Russian was the language of everyday communication, although, of course, Yiddish was known, and was kept up by the wives.

Tobias married Blyuma Berkovich from Shlok [(today Sloka in Jurmala, 35 km west of Riga)]. A traditional Jewish community settled in Shlok after all sorts of restrictions had been placed on Jews in Riga [1](#). Blyuma was famous in the family chronicle as a vigorous and striking woman. Some stories of a comic nature survived to this day. Once, shopping at the Kraslava market place, Blyuma noticed someone selling a high-quality sour cream at a very reasonable price. She didn't have suitable vessels with her. But she wanted to buy that sour cream, and potters were selling some vessels that resembled chamber-pots. She bought some of those pots, rinsed them right there, and bought the sour cream. When she brought the cream home, her family bluntly refused to eat from those pots.

Is this the same as Yurmala or a different place? Just thought I'd rather ask because you brought up the spelling of Latvian places the other day.

Tobias and Blyuma had five children, four sons and a daughter. One son was my grandfather Moisei, who became mayor of Kraslava. Before the tragic events of 1941, his sister Shterna, to whom he was very close, also lived in Kraslava. Solomon, the eldest of the sons, was a dentist and had a successful practice in Riga. In the 1920s, he was elected chairman of Riga's Jewish Dental Surgery Society. I read his obituary. He was rather well known in Riga because of his medical and public activity. One son, Isaak, had died early. In At the beginning of the century, when inflammation was a serious disease and surgical intervention was considered risky, he died of appendicitis in St. Petersburg. I have no information about Tobias's son Meyer.

Samuil also had four daughters and two sons. Samuil was married to a girl from the Grodzensky family named Zelda, from a Lithuanian borough called Kalvaria. She was from a rather intellectual environment. Samuil's daughters were particularly intelligent. All of them married and gave birth to outstanding children. Masha married her cousin, Tobias's son, Moisei. They are my grandparents.

Her sister Shifra, common name Serafima [2](#), married Moisei Botvinnik, who was not from Kraslava, but from the same region [(Latgale in eastern Latvia)]. They had two sons. One of them, Mikhail, became the chess champion of the world. They lived in Petrograd most of the time, and it is there that the chess genius of Michael Botvinnik developed. In the 1920s and 1930s, Grandfather was closest to his relatives who had settled in Petrograd even before the World War I. The correspondence between Grandmother Masha and Serafima was regular. Mikhail Botvinnik was then studying to become an electrical engineer. Among his teachers was a professor of geometry, from a family of Armenian descent, who had a rather attractive daughter, Ganna [(Gayane Davidovna)], a student at the Vaganov ballet school. Mikhail fell in love with her.

The repressions of the 1930s [3](#) did n'ot touch my Leningrad relatives. The daughter of the great chess player, Olga, lives in Moscow now. She was born in the summer of 1941. They managed to

leave Leningrad on what was literally the last train before the blockade [4](#) started. She graduated from the Moscow Power Institute, specializing in computer science and computer devices. She married a good Russian man named Fioshkin, an engineer, and they have two children, Yura and Lena. And these children also have children. I used to visit them, and they came to Riga several times. Now our contacts are less frequent. I know Olga very well, but I don't have direct contacts with her children any more.

I added the entries for Great Terror and Blockade of Leningrad here.

Another one of Samuil's daughters, Bella, married Solomon Konnikov. Their daughter Ida became the main archivist of our family and, thanks to her, plenty of relics survived: photos, family silver, Samuil's memorabilia. Sofia, another of Samuil's daughters, was the grandmother of one of our prominent public figures - Alexander Bergman, the lawyer. Samuil's son Alexander married a girl from the Adelberg family, which owned a large bookshop in Dvinsk [(today Daugavpils, 230 km south east of Riga)]. Their daughter, Lia Alexandrovna, married a man named Gromov and left for the United States. We write to each other constantly. She has two sons - Vladimir and Mikhail. Mikhail Gromov, the son of Lia Alexandrovna, is a mathematician, a member of the French Academy, and lives in Paris.

My grandfather on my father's side was Moisei Rabinovich, Tobias's son. He was born in 1883. He received a double name Moisei-Abram Rabinovich. But he is known as Moisei. Father's parents, Moisei and Masha, got married under a chuppah, I think. They lived in Kraslava. Father, the first son, was born in 1911. He was named in honor of grandfather's brother. In 1923, their second son Samuil-Alexander was born. At that time, educated people didn't want to emphasize their Jewish roots, so he was named Alexander.

Moisei was known for his commitment to education and patriotism and love for his native city. In their house they had a large collection of Russian educational literature, in particular the Pavlenkov Library, all sorts of enlightening editions, which Moisei digested and studied in the most steadfast way. He tried to obtain knowledge in both natural sciences and humanities. Because of his desire to help his compatriots, he chose the pharmaceutical business as his profession. It was a popular field of business for many natives of the Lithuanian and Vitebsk territories, to which Kraslava belonged at the time. The position of pharmacist required a higher education, a diploma of a medical faculty. It was possible to become an assistant pharmacist if you prepared for examinations independently. This is what Moisei Rabinovich did. I suppose he passed the exam in the Military Medical Academy in St. Petersburg.

Thanks to Count Plater, a power station was built in Kraslava in the 1910s to illuminate the streets. Moisei Rabinovich was one of the managers of that municipal power station. He possessed enough knowledge of natural sciences and sufficient experience to manage it.

During the World War I, when population was evacuated to central Russia, Grandfather Samuil moved to his family, in Petrograd [Leningrad in Soviet times, now and earlier St. Petersburg], together with the family relics. In 1917-1918, they again moved to Kraslava. At that time, industrial equipment had been transported deep into Russian territory, lest it be seized by the Germans. Moisei followed the power station to Oryol region of Russia. You see, Kraslava stood on the route of the famous Riga-Oryol railway, which was an important economic line.

In 1990, I started to study the files of the Kraslava city administration in the Latvian historical archive. That is how I learned what happened to Grandfather Moisei, from approximately 1920. My father's family returned from Oryol to Kraslava in May or June 1921. They immediately found that the city was dominated by members of the Polish community, who were partly supported by Count Plater. Although the Plater family acknowledged its Polish origins, the family believed they were as rather indirect. In 1921, it appeared that Moisei Rabinovich was the most authoritative representative, by any historical standards, of the Jewish community in Kraslava, a powerful and important public figure in the eyes of the numerous national groups. So he was put forward for municipal activity from the moment he returned to Kraslava, when local self-management was being restored. Kraslava didn't have the status of a city, but the uncertain status of a borough.

Moisei was elected a member of municipal administration and started to handle all the complex issues of municipal economy. From the summer of 1921 until the autumn fall of 1932, he was a member of Kraslava's municipal administration. He first was vice-mayor; later, he was the mayor. For eleven years, his life was wholly and completely connected with municipal self-management. The year 1932, if I can say so, was an anticipation of the state coup of 1934 [53](#), which took place in Kraslava. In autumn fall of 1932, the elected city council decided that Moisei did not have the proper influence with the central authorities in Riga, and thus generous financing didn't materialize, and it was necessary to select another head of the city. So he was discharged.

Until the Soviet times [64](#), Moisei led a private life. He returned to the pharmaceutical business in the Soviet times. He was appointed the manager of a drugstore in the small town of Ezernieki, near Kraslava, where he met his death. Moisei, Masha and their son Samuil Alexander were killed in 1941 [75](#).

What were the brightest moments in the activity of Moisei Rabinovich in his public post? Immediately after assuming office in 1921, he was designated, as a man known for his honesty and skill in financial affairs, a supervisor of all municipal finance. Moisei put forward the initiative for Kraslava to obtain the status of a city. And he had submitted that initiative to the authorities in the first days of 1922. He wrote a report for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with his proposal that Kraslava get the status of a city. That hand-written report is in the state archive. His initiative was supported by the then prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, Zigfrid Meyerovits, who gave the green light to the initiative. One of the first decrees of President Janis Chakste [(first President of independent Latvia)] [86](#) in 1923 was to confirm Kraslava's status as a city. Grandfather is said to have put forward the idea of the creation of the Kraslava city emblem - a boat with five oars, symbolizing the five main ethnic groups of Kraslava: Jews, Poles, Russians, Latvians and Belarusians. Moisei was a proponent of electrification and put his greatest efforts toward two things - the Kraslava power station and the work of public schools under the supervision of municipal government. He entered into discussion of problems of the Jewish school, when Janis Rainis, the famous Latvian poet, became the minister of education of Latvia. The two men had certain differences of opinion, but they also reached agreements.

My grandfather was an educated man; therefore he didn't find it appropriate to go to the synagogue or observe the fast. He had moved rather far from the traditional Jewish religious principles. I have no such information, but, maybe, his wife adhered to some Jewish traditions. They were honest people and therefore lived with difficulties and sometimes even poorly. And that poor life prevented them from strict following of Jewish traditions.

My father, Isaak Moiseevich Rabinovich, finished the Kraslava grammar school in 1927. He was under a very strong psychological influence of his father, but they had certain problems in their relationships. In 1927, Father entered the Mechanics faculty of the Latvian University in Riga. And under the influence of his father, he chose the profession of practical engineering. But he graduated not from the Mechanics one, but from the Physics and Mathematics faculty and as late as 1945!

My father took part in public activities, like Grandfather. From the beginning of the 1930s he worked in the Bund [9](#) in Riga. He did not join leftist radicals or the underground Komsomol [107] groups, but was oriented toward the social-democratic movement, Bund. He was an active member of the Bund students' social-democratic union 'Zukunft.'. He was an active worker for hospital mutual aid funds, was a bookkeeper and auditor. Father was the coordinator of a successful strike of retail trade workers in 1933, which is known as the 'Yakhnin conflict.'. That strike succeeded because of the workers' solidarity. They forced the shop owners to increase workers' wages. Father was punished for his activity.

I put the entry we have for Bund here.

During the revolution in Latvia in May 1934, he was among the people who were subjected to security arrest. Along with many social-democratic workers, he was jailed in the Central Prison for about three months. He was released on condition that he sign a statement obliging him to quit public activity. My father signed. When his imprisonment ended, he put aside his student's exemption and served his term in the Latvian army. His studies at the university advanced very slowly. At the end of 1937, he left the army and became a private teacher of Mathematics. The demand for private tutors was probably connected to the decisions of the Karlis Ulmanis [118] government, which required that students pass examinations in the Latvian language to obtain a secondary school certificate. Father knew Russian and Latvian. He became a highly demanded teacher of Mathematics. He earned good money from 1937 through 1939 by preparing students for examinations in the Latvian language. Father told me that in that period they met in a narrow circle to study Marxist literature and, in particular, the works of Plekhanov [129].

I changed the two entries that were here originally to the ones from our current list.

When he studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at the university, he made many friends. He became acquainted with Vladimir Feigman, the son of the auditor of the Ministry of Finance. The man was from a Russian-Lithuanian-Latvian family. My mother, Dora [(Dvoira)] Alperovich, and my father met because they were in Feigman's circle. It is a romantic story! Vladimir Feigman took a great interest in photography, and his friends helped him develop snapshots. My mother and father became acquainted in a dark room, printing photos, in the autumn fall of 1939. Mother had been on a short trip to Paris to visit some friends. The trip was suddenly interrupted by the beginning of World War II. It was only with the help of the Latvian Consulate in Paris that she managed to escape from France in the autumn fall of 1939. It was a happy turn of events, good luck for her.

Mother was born in 1912 in a small Belarusian town, Postavy. She studied Economics by herself. When she was older, she used to reproach herself saying that she didn't have the persistence to acquire a diploma. By character, she was more of a family woman, a housewife.

My parents got married rather quickly - on the eve of the New Year of 1940. Their marriage was officially registered by the Latvian state. Mother sometimes recalled that her family, especially my grandfather Ber Alperovich, was quite religious. In his youth, he received an advanced Jewish religious education, and he zealously adhered to traditions. To please her parents, Father agreed to undergo some kind of a procedure that corresponds to the Jewish religious marriage. He was skeptical of any and all religious traditions, including Jewish ones. But after the events of summer 1940 [130], his professional business underwent changes, and Father became more or less tolerant of all that. He was about to graduate, was in his last year in the university, and simultaneously he got a job teaching the preparatory courses at the university.

I know nothing about my grandfather and grandmother on Mother's side. Mother's family language was Yiddish. There were three sisters and three brothers. It was a famous family here in Riga. Ber Alperovich, Mother's father, was known by his Russian name - Boris Alperovich. Grandmother Tsipe Alperovich [nee Tager] was from Jakobstadt [(today called Jekabpils, 143 km east of Riga)]. The family legend says that when Grandfather Ber was traveling as a salesman in the region of Kurlandia [(today Kurzeme, western Latvia)], Kovensky province, he once came to Jakobstadt and saw a very healthy, plump girl with bright pink cheeks. He thought, 'This girl is exactly what I want for my wife.' And she became his wife. In the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s, Grandmother suffered from diabetes and was sent once a year for a one-month treatment in Bikur Holim [141] in Riga.

Their family was very large. During World War II Grandmother was evacuated with all her family and died in Uni Kirov (today Vyatka in Russia), Kirov region, where I was born. She died one month after my birth. My grandfather returned from evacuation and is buried at the Jewish cemetery in Smerli, Riga.

I changed this according to the info given in the tree.

The whole Alperovich family had its roots in the Polish-Belarusian town of Postavy. The older brother, Ovsei Alperovich, settled in Riga at the beginning of the 20th century. In the early 1920s, during an economic upsurge, three Alperovich brothers had settled in Riga - Ovsei, Ber and Natan. They decided to organize a joint venture - a small wholesale company to supply flour and other necessities to bakeries. Small private bakeries were a rather widespread phenomenon in all of Latvia. And that firm was called Obonat, the abbreviation from the names of the three brothers - Ovsei, Boris, Natan.

Most members of Ovsei and Natan's family became victims of Fascism. Natan's entire family perished. Ovsei's daughter, Tatiana Ovseievna Mikelson, managed to evacuate. Mother was especially close with that family. Tatiana was ten years older than Mother. A native of Riga, she guided Mother through Riga's life, Riga's customs.

Mother's name was Dvoira, but under the German-Russian influence, she was registered as Dora in the official documents. Mother was the eldest sister of her family. She received a secondary education in a grammar school in Riga where the language of instruction was Yiddish. The director of that school was Isaak Bers, a rather active figure of the social-democratic movement, loyal to the Latvian republic. Such liberal spirit was characteristic of that grammar school, where the representatives of democratic Jewish circles of Riga studied. The school was in Gertrudes Street. Mother and her sister Lia had numerous acquaintances from that school. Mother finished grammar

school in at the beginning of the 1930s. Mother worked in Obonat as a shop assistant and kept business documents. In that practical way, she became a qualified bookkeeper.

Lia graduated from the Latvian conservatory at the time of the first Latvian republic, in the 1930s. Her first husband's family name was Vulfson; her second spouse's name was Churilin. From the first marriage, she had a daughter named Kira; from the second, a daughter named Alla. In the Soviet period, Lia was a very good concertmaster, but she lost her hearing and retired early. She now lives in Israel. The third sister was Reisen [(common name Rose)]. She died in Israel. Naum, Mother's older brother, died in the war in 1943.

This sister isn't mentioned in the tree, I added her there.

Her second brother, Vulf Alperovich [(1904-1976)], studied at the Latvian University, then the Faculty of Law, from which he graduated in 1935. Vulf Alperovich got married in 1949 to his close friend from pre-war times, Eida Isaevna [(nee Berkovich)]. She has her own story. She was married to Iosif Peretsman, one of our Riga acquaintances, a famous Jewish Komsomol leader, who in at the beginning of the 1930s set off to build the city of Birobidzhan [1512] with a group of Jewish Komsomol members. He was the editor of a Komsomol newspaper there, but in 1937, at the time of the Stalinist persecutions, [13](#) he was arrested and perished. His wife seized their son and fled from Birobidzhan, through all of Siberia, and reached her brother in Leningrad. In 1945, when her former husband disappeared, she turned up in Riga and met Vulf Borisovich. She was a really beautiful and elegant woman. They got married.

I took out the glossary entry for Great Terror here because I already put it earlier in the story.

Mother's younger brother, Grisha, or Grigory [(Jewish name Girsh)], received an education in textiles industries engineering. He went especially for that purpose to Brno, Slovakia, and with that specialization he got a very good position in Riga. Oriented toward a secular environment, Grisha wanted the family to live in a prestigious apartment. His sisters were grown girls by that time, and he was convinced that a prestigious apartment would attract the young people and facilitate the girls' chances for successful marriages. He filed lots of requests with the manager of one fashionable house at 40 Brivibas Street, convincing him to lease a rather large and convenient apartment to the family. Around 1935, the family moved to that apartment, which had five rooms and a room for maids, near the kitchen. They had a maid the whole time Mother's family lived atin 40 Brivibas Street. Both Vulf and Grigory Borisovich were still single then.

Then the war began. Our family was lucky to evacuate to Russia on 27th June 1941, to the city of Kirov, where a lot of trains with refugees from Latvia were going. Mother was pregnant with me then. We were assigned to the village of Uni, far from the railway line. I was born there in November 1941. Father was given a position of Mathematics teacher in the local school. In August, Latvian military regiments were being formed [164]. All men were sent to those Gorohovetski camps, where Latvian rifle battalions were formed. Father was in artillery, was given the rank of senior sergeant and assigned the tasks of a military topographer. He participated in all the battles in which the Latvian division took part, including the famous Narofominsk fights. In the spring of 1942 he found himself in Staraya Russa, where conditions were very harsh and the soldiers didn't have enough food.

On one mission, Father was wounded and sent to hospital, in the town of Ostashkovo on Lake Seliger. Once, while he was recovering and reading a book on Physics, Kolbanovsky, a front-line doctor, approached Father and asked if he could maintain X-ray and other equipment. There were very few experts capable of maintaining that sort of equipment. Father immediately agreed. It was not difficult to transfer him from the ranks of the Latvian rifle division to the appropriate military-medical unit, where he quickly became an expert technician. Around the autumn fall of 1942, Father obtained the rank of lieutenant-engineer. His further service was connected with military-medical units. He was dismissed from service in the rank of senior lieutenant.

My father was with the Steppe Front in 1943, and later with the Second Ukrainian Front. When Father was at the Second Ukrainian Front, he was appointed assistant to the chief surgeon of that front, a Soviet medical doctor named Elansky. He went with this unit through Moldova and Hungary. In May 1945, he was somewhere in the Protectorate of Bohemia. During the entire period of his military service, Father did not get a leave. Right after his demobilization in August 1945, Father passed his graduation exams at the Latvian University, which had been interrupted in June 1941.

In the post-war years, my father was completely absorbed in official pedagogical work. He was a professor of Mathematics, worked in the higher education system by correspondence and in evening courses. We had a huge scientific library at home. Father taught Mathematics, but later he became a scientific researcher at the Astrophysics laboratory of the Academy of Sciences. Father was an outstanding popularizer of Mathematics and Astronomy for wide circles of population. He is the author of a great number of publications - 186 written works. Detailed information about his scientific career was published in the book 'From the History of Natural Sciences and Engineering in the Baltic States'.

In Uni, while we were in evacuation, Grandfather worked as a weigher. But the main means by which we subsisted was my father's officer's certificate. The men who served in the acting army got certain allowances for their families.

How happy we were to hear the news of the liberation of Riga on radio when we were in Uni! And after that message, the whole family started to anticipate going back to Riga. Vulf, who was an administrator of industry in the government of the Latvian Soviet republic, was released from the army. He was ordered to return to the liberated Riga along with other industrial managers. He arrived in Riga in October 1944. We returned to Riga in January 1945.

Vulf set off to 40 Brivibas Street, from which the whole family left for evacuation in June 1941. As soon as he stepped in the courtyard, he was met by the caretaker of the house, carrying the keys of the apartment. Everything indicated that an important official of the German administration had been staying in the apartment, probably the chief of the German security service. The apartment was very well equipped, with a lot of beautiful furniture - not the furniture our family left. There were solid stoves and tile furnaces that had not been there before. An ordinary family could have hardly afforded such substantial heating. There were many magnificent, multivolume publications in the apartment: encyclopedias, books on art, atlases. All publications were of a German nationalistic character, but you couldn't say that those books were Nazi propaganda. There also were numerous sets of Fascist newsreels in the apartment. The children who returned to the apartment started to play with those bobbins of films. However, the men realized that these



chronicles could be of interest to the Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs. All these films were given to the appropriate authorities without much fuss. Some of that literature was burned in furnaces.

My father had strict Soviet-type views on labor and family life: Everyone in the family should work, and a child should receive a public Soviet education. Right after returning to Riga, Mother mobilized all her knowledge of accounting. With the assistance of Vulf, who was a lawyer with the Ministry of Light Industry, Mother got a job in that ministry. When I was nine, I was ill with a lung disease. To nurse me through that illness, Mother left work, and for a year or a year and a half, she was occupied only with the household. When my health recovered, she was close to pension age and started to work as a bookkeeper. We had no nannies. I used to go to Pioneer camps [175]. We had a summer cottage in the period when I was sick, when I needed to get rid of that lung disease. Now I feel nostalgic each time when I think of those beautiful places in Jurmala, not far from Riga.

See my question regarding spelling before

I was an only child. I had comfortable conditions at home. Father sharply criticized me quite often for my various mistakes and lack of self-control, but Mother was softer. In general, there was a favorable family atmosphere that enhanced my success. I finished a standard Soviet school - a Riga secondary school. I entered the mathematical branch of the faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the Latvian University. After graduation, I started to work as a programmer in the computer center of the Latvian University, and I quickly was assigned to this center [186]. I served in the army for one year, in the Leningrad military district. After the army [197], I continued to work in the university's computer center. Then I was transferred to the computer center at the State Committee on Supplies. It coincided with my idea of getting married. I began to get a higher salary and, with that salary, I could present myself in a more favorable light as a groom. But I was not satisfied with my marriage.

I was dismissed from my job in 1980, but not because of my nationality. I didn't feel any open pressure because I was a Jew [2018]. All that was hidden, latent. After I was dismissed, I didn't work. I was n'ot looking for any job. I was a moderate dissident. My non-conformity manifested itself in responding to newspaper publications, writing political articles to some newspapers. I had an especially active correspondence in 1982 with the Moscow newspaper 'The Soviet Culture.'. With my public activity from the beginning of 1980, I was very close to the public opinion that resulted in the so-called perestroika [2119] reforms in the late 1980s.

I am a rank and file member of the Latvian Association of the Jewish Culture [220] and I regularly pay the fees. I was n'ot among the founders of the association. I joined the organization in 1990, and all my work is now connected with this society.

In the Soviet times Mother used to call the office of the Riga religious community and ask when Pesach and Rosh Hashanah would fall, according to the official religious calendar. And we had some traditional Jewish meals on these days. But she didn't go to the synagogue. She died in 1985. Mother and Father are buried at the Jewish cemetery in Riga.

Since I grew up under the strong influence of my Father, I do not go to the synagogue, I am completely secular. I remember my grandfather Ber a little bit. He regularly visited the synagogue together with his friends - the believing Jews. He stayed in the same track all his life and didn't

swerve from it. None of his children really inherited his religious zeal. Out of respect for their parents, they observed certain traditions, but no more than that. Mother's brother Grigory, who was inclined to humor and comic behavior, sometimes pretended that he adhered to traditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, he used to go to the synagogue, but his sisters made fun of him.

A funny but not very pleasant political story happened to Vulf Borisovich when de-Stalinization began [231]. In 1940, he joined the Communist Party and, in general, he was a very pro-Soviet man. Mother always remembered his exclamation: 'What a remarkable country we live in!' His pro-Soviet views ripened as early as the 1930s in Riga, with the so-called 'Acadsoyuz' - a Jewish Communist students union. It was founded in 1930-34, and was a more or less underground organization before the Ulmanis revolution on 15th May 1934. In 1957, Vulf and his friends decided that all Stalinist restrictions passed into history. They resolved to invite their pre-war 'Acadsoyuz' friend from the 1930s, who was then living in Paris, to reminisce about their Komsomol youth. But it turned out that the KGB [242] was permanently spying on their friend, who had just arrived. In 1958, the whole company was charged with a severe accusation - failing to inform the appropriate Party bodies of their plan to meet a Western representative. That meeting took place at Vulf's apartment. Mother was at that meeting but, as she was n'ot a member of the Party, she was n'ot accused. Vulf was expelled from the Party and dismissed from the Bar of Lawyers. In the 1960s, he filed petitions with several congresses of the Communist Party, asking them to restore him, but all the petitions were rejected. Otherwise, his reputation was irreproachable. He had good relations with the executives of the ministerial administrations, and he became a lawyer with some industrial enterprise.

This whole story affected his daughter Ira in such a way that she grew up with a completely different orientation - not a dissident, but definitely a bourgeois. In 1979, she left for America. She is an entirely material woman. She decided that, being a good engineer, she would go to America and earn a lot of money. She has a son, Michael. Seeing that Michael could n'ot arrange his personal life, they went to China and found a Chinese girl to be his wife. This is what I call the American way! The meeting of civilizations!

Glossary

## **1 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.

## **2 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents.

The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

### **3 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.

### **4 Blockade of Leningrad**

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

### **53 Coup in Latvia in 1934**

originally, after gaining independence in 1918, Latvia was a democratic parliamentary republic. In November 1933, the Saeima eliminated the workers and peasants' fraction by its decision, and its deputies were sent to court. President Karlis Ulmanis staged a bloodless coup in May 1934 and puts an end to political chaos caused by a fractured parliament. All political parties were banned, their publishing offices were closed and the Seim was dismissed. All workers', political organizations and trade unions were eliminated. Jews were gradually forced out of Latvia's political and economic life. The Jewish socialist party and youth movements were banned. Anti-Semitic demonstrations became more frequent, Jews were not allowed to hold official positions, and there was a percentage quota introduced at Riga University. A dictatorship was established in Latvia in 1934. Thus, Ulmanis did not involve broad repression and spoke publicly as the 'guarantor of stability'. On the whole, his regime did not violate the rights of national minorities, and in the late 1930s they even sheltered a few thousand Jewish refugees from Germany and issued them Latvian passports. Many Latvians remember the Ulmanis' time as a period of economic and cultural reviviscence. The standard of living in Latvia was one of the highest in Europe at the time.

## **64 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 three 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 16 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 14-15th July elections took place in Latvia. Its results were largely manipulated by the new country's leadership and 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.

## **75 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.

## **86 Latvian independence**

The end of the 19th century was marked by a rise of the national consciousness and the start of national movement in Latvia, that was a 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 leave these lands in its ownership, while the winning countries were not willing to let these countries to be annexed to the Soviet Russia. The current international situation gave Latvia a chance to gain its own statehood. From 1917 Latvian nationalists secretly plot against the Germans. When Germany surrenders on 11th November, they seize their chance and declare Latvia's independence at the National Theatre on 18th November, 1918. Under the Treaty of Riga, Russia promises to respect Latvia's independence for all time. Latvia's independence is recognized by the international community on 26th January 1921, and nine months later Latvia is 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.

## **9 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

## **[107] 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.

## **11 Ulmanis, Karlis (1877-1942)**

the most prominent politician in pre- World War II Latvia. Educated in Switzerland, Germany and the USA, Ulmanis was one of founders of Latvian People's Council (Tautas Padome), which proclaimed Latvia's independence on November 18, 1918. He then became the first prime minister of Latvia and held this post in several governments from 1918 to 1940. In 1934, Ulmanis dissolved the parliament and established an authoritarian government. He allowed President Alberts Kviesis to serve the rest of the term until 1936, after which Ulmanis proclaimed himself president, in addition to being prime minister. In his various terms of office he worked to resist internal dissension - instituting authoritarian rule in 1934 - and military threats from Russia. Soviet occupation forced his resignation in 1940, and he was arrested and deported to Russia, where he died. Ulmanis remains a controversial figure in Latvia. A sign of Ulmanis still being very popular in Latvia is that his grand-nephew Guntis Ulmanis was elected president in 1993.

## **[128] Plekhanov, Georgy (1856-1918)**

Russian revolutionary and social philosopher. He was a leader in introducing Marxist theory to Russia and is often called the 'Father of Russian Marxism'. He left Russia in 1880 as a political refugee and spent most of his exile in Geneva, Switzerland. Plekhanov took the view that conditions in Russia would not be ripe for socialism until capitalism and industrialization had progressed sufficiently. This opinion was the basis of Menshevik thought after the split in 1903 of the Social Democratic Labor Party into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. After the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, he returned from exile. Following the triumph of Lenin he retired from public life. Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov was a Russian revolutionary and a Marxist theoretician. He was a founder of the Social-Democratic movement in Russia. Plekhanov contributed many ideas to Marxism in the area of philosophy and the roles of art and religion in society. In his political activities he adopted the nom de guerre of Volgin, after the Volga River.

## **9 Ulmanis Karlis (1877 - 1942), a prominent Latvian politician, born to the family of a land owner**

Ulmanis studied agriculture at the ETH Zurich, Switzerland and at Leipzig University, Germany and then worked in Latvia as a writer, lecturer, and manager in agricultural positions. Ulmanis was one of the principal founders of the Latvian People's Council (Tautas Padome), which proclaimed Latvia's independence from Russia on November 18, 1918. A constitutional convention established Latvia as a parliamentary democracy in 1920. Ulmanis was the first Prime Minister of a Latvia which had become independent for the first time in 700 years. He also served as Prime Minister in several subsequent Latvian government administrations during the period of Latvian independence from 1918 to 1940. He also founded the Latvian Agrarian (Farmer's) Union. On May 15, 1934, Ulmanis as Prime Minister dissolved the Latvian Parliament Saeima and established executive non-parliamentary authoritarian rule. In 1936 Ulmanis unconstitutionally merged the office of President and Prime Minister in his own person. Although the U.S. State Department had information at that time that the Soviet Union had agreed to exile Ulmanis to Switzerland, he was in fact arrested by the Soviets and deported to points unknown. His fate was only learned in the post-Gorbachev era. Ulmanis is now known to have died in a prison in Krasnovodsk in the present Turkmenistan during World War II.

### **[130] Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)**

After the Soviet Union occupied the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in June 1940 as a part of establishing the Soviet system, mass deportation of the local population began. The victims of these were mainly but not exclusively those unwanted by the regime: the local bourgeoisie and the previously politically active strata. Deportations to remote parts of the Soviet Union continued up until the death of Stalin. The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. Deportations were reintroduced after the Soviet Army recaptured the three countries from Nazi Germany in 1944. Partisan fights against the Soviet occupiers were going on all up to 1956, when the last squad was eliminated. Between June 1948 and January 1950, in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodged from labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life' 52,541 people from Latvia, 118,599 people from Lithuania and 32,450 people from Estonia were deported. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Latvian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable to reject the regime. Most of the exiled died in the foreign land. Besides, about 100,000 people were killed in action and in fusillade for being members of partisan squads and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

### **[141] Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim**

established by the community with 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 three departments: therapeutic, surgery and neurology. Director of the hospital was Isaac Joffe, 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 destroyed 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.

### **[152] Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

### **13 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.

### **[164] Latvian division**

Latvian rifle division 201 was formed in August/September 1941. The formation started in the Gorohovetski camps in the vicinity of Gorky (present Nizhniy NOvgorod), where most of evacuated Latvians were located. On 12 September 1941 the division soldiers took an oath. By early December 1941 the division consisted of 10,348 people, about 30% of them were Jews. 90% of the division commanders and officers were Latvian citizens. In early December 1941 units of the Latvian division were taken to the front. From 20 December 1941 till 14 January 1942, during the Soviet counterattack near Moscow the division took part in severe battles near Naro-Fominsk and Borovsk. The casualties constituted 55% of the staff, including 58% privates, 30% junior commanding officers. Total casualties constituted about 5700 people, including about 1060 Jews.

[175] 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.

### **[186] Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

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

### **[197] Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards - two years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet - three years, for medium and senior officers - 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and Cossacks were not drafted into the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was three years and in the navy- four years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to two years in ground troops and in the navy to three years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

### **[2018] Item 5**

This was the nationality/ethnicity line, which was included on all job application forms and in passports. Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War WII until the late 1980s.

### **[2119] 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.

### **[220] Latvian Society of Jewish Culture (LSJC)**

formed in autumn 1988 under the leadership of Esphir 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 the establishment of a 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 in the LSJC.

### **[231] 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.

### **[242] KGB**

Committee of State Security, took over from NKVD: People's Committee of Internal Affairs; which earlier used to be called the GPU, the state security agency