

Perle Liya Epshteyn

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I interviewed Liya Epshteyn in the hotel. Liya is not a very tall woman. She is very agile, energetic and brisk. Her hair is curly and her eyes are bright. Liya is very affable and good-wishing. She is good company. When we started conversation, there was no tension, typical for unacquainted people. Liya said that after a difficult operation she had to go through, she changed her attitude to life completely and understood that the most important thing was love of everything around us and to love oneself. I could feel Liya's attitude towards people around her, which was like a warm wave. I wish that wonderful woman a long life, and as for joy, she will find that herself.

The story of my father's family goes back to Great-grandfather David Epstein. Even Father did not know where my great-grandfather was from. In adolescence he was drafted into the tsarist army. He was a Cantonist [1](#). It meant that Great-grandfather came from a poor family – boys from wealthy families were not assigned to the Cantonists. He served in Nikolai's army [2](#) for 25 years. It was the term of service for the soldiers at that time.

Having been demobilized from the Nikolai's army, the soldiers enjoyed great privileges. For their service the state granted them a large plot of land and money to get married and start their own business. There was a pale of settlement for the Jews [3](#) in Tsarist Russia. As per decree of the tsar Cantonists-Jews were permitted to settle anywhere they wished, even if Jews were banned to live in that place. That is why upon finishing the army service Great-grandfather was able to settle in Tallinn sometime in between 1840 and the 1850s, even though Jews were generally not permitted to reside there. Since that time all generations of our family had lived in Tallinn.

Great-grandfather got married in Tallinn. I do not remember the name of my great-grandmother. I do not know what my great-grandfather did for a living. I did not know any of their children, but my grandfather. My paternal grandfather Lazar, in Jewish Leizer, Epshteyn was born in the 1850s. When Grandfather was an adult, he became a trade dealer. He probably was prone for commerce as he rather swiftly became the owner of a readymade store in downtown Tallinn starting from a chandler. Garments for men and women were sold in my grandfather's store.

Grandfather was famous for being exclusively honest. Epshteyn in Tallinn was associated with honesty, if someone wanted to say that all was square, they said, 'Like with the Epsteins.' In his childhood, my grandfather received Jewish education. He was a religious man. Grandfather married a lady from Tallinn. Grandmother's name was Gute-Mere. Her maiden name is not known to me.

The grandparents had seven children: four sons and three daughters. The eldest was Moses, then Solomon, and Rosa. The fourth child of the family, my father David, was born in 1894. Then Sarah, Berta and the youngest, Boris [4](#), were born. Boris's Jewish name was Ber.

Yiddish was spoken in my father's family during his childhood. Everybody knew Estonian and Russian. The family was religious. Jewish traditions were observed. Sabbath was marked at home as well as Jewish holidays. Of course, my grandparents were more religious than others. I would even say that they were pious, sticking to Jewish traditions in full compliance. As for the next generation, their children, they were not as religious. They definitely observed Jewish traditions, but in a more secular way. Religion was a pivot in Grandfather's life. He was constantly making donations at the Tallinn synagogue [5](#), contributed a handwritten Torah.

All children in our family got a good education, as grandfather looked into that. There was a Russian lyceum in Tallinn. It was called Nikolayevskaya after the Russian Tsar. Father and his siblings finished that lyceum. Father obtained higher education at Berlin University. He graduated from the Medical Department, then he went through internship in urology. Upon graduation from the university my father had to confirm the diploma, issued in Germany. He was supposed to pass exams in the Medical Department of the University in Yuriev – now the city of Tartu. It was called Yuriev in Tsarist Russia. As soon as Father passed the exam, he was entitled to practice medicine on the territory of the Russian Empire.

Father's elder brother Moses also studied at Berlin University. Moses was specialized in gynecology. He became the best gynecologist in Tallinn of that time. I do not know what education was obtained by father's elder brother Solomon. He finished lyceum for sure. He had a store in Tallinn. Father's younger sister Sarah finished the Sorbonne [University in France]. She was proficient in French and taught that language. The youngest, Boris, studied at the Economy Department of Vienna University. Upon graduation he came back to Tallinn, worked as an accountant in Grandfather's store. I do not know what education father's sisters Rosa and Berta got. Both of them finished lyceum, but I cannot recall, if they went on with their education.

Grandfather Lazar died in the early 1920s, long before I was born. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. The funeral was in accordance with the Jewish rite. Grandfather's grave is still there.

During World War I, the Germans occupied the territory of Estonia. After the Germans, Estonia was captured by Bolsheviks [6](#). The Germans gave power to the temporary government of Estonia, but the Russian Bolsheviks, supported by Estonian communists, wanted Estonia to become Soviet. They commenced military actions from Narva and almost reached Tallinn. The Estonian army fought them, with the assistance of the troops of England, Finland and the Russian White Guards [7](#).

During the Estonian War of Liberation [8](#) my father and his elder brother Moses discontinued their studies and joined the Estonian liberation army. Since they were knowledgeable about medicine, both of them were medical assistants, but they also took part in military actions. When the war of liberation was over, Estonia gained independence [9](#). Father never told me about his experience in military actions.

In the 1990s, during my stay in Israel, I visited a museum in Tel Aviv, where I was given the list of Estonian Jews, who took part in the Estonian War of Liberation of 1918. My father and Uncle Moses were in that list. There I also found out about the origin of my surname, Epstein. The last name Epshteyn is common among Jews. It turned out that this name stems from Austria.

Moses was married twice. I do not remember his first wife. Their daughter Anna became an outstanding Estonian ballet dancer. His second wife's name was Revekka. I do not remember her maiden name. They had a son, Alexander. Solomon was married to a certain Mervits. Their daughter Miriam was born in 1919. I cannot recall the first name of Rosa's husband. He came from a wealthy and respectable family in Tartu by the name of Klompus. They had two daughters, Natalia and Tamara. Sarah married a certain Klas. Sarah had two children: daughter Irene and son Lazar. Berta married a certain Roubinovich. I do not remember the name of her only daughter. She is currently residing in the USA. Boris married Mihil Minkov. She was called Manya in the family.

Mother's family lived in Belarus. My maternal grandfather, Shaye-Itse Levin, and my grandmother Perle-Esse are from what today is Belarus. It was Polish territory at that time, so my grandparents were fluent in Polish. Grandmother even looked like a Polish lady. She had fair hair and blue eyes. Mother said that Grandfather fell in love with her at first sight. I do not know, what education Grandfather received. Grandmother finished three grades of Jewish school. She was a very cultured, tactful and intelligent woman. She was a wonderful mother and grandmother. I loved her very much.

Mother's family lived in the town of Korotkovo of Mogilev province [about 200 km from Minsk]. It was a truly Jewish town. Grandfather dealt with timbering, and Grandmother was a housewife. My grandparents had six children, who were born in Korotkovo. The eldest was a son, Shmuel-Sakhne, then Haim and Bentsion were born. Then three daughters were born: Rahil, Sarah, who was called Sonya in the family and my mother Revekka. Her Jewish name was Riva-Breine. Mother was born in 1900.

I do not know when exactly and for what reason my mother's family moved to the Estonian town of Narva bordering on Russian [about 200 km from Tallinn]. All I know is that Mother finished a Russian lyceum in Narva. All her siblings were educated. Though, I do not recall if Mother's sisters studied anywhere beside the lyceum. Mother's brother received higher education. Shmuel-Sakhne and Haim became lawyers, and Bentsion became an economist.

Shmuel-Sakhne married Anna Rogovskaya. Their only son Simon subsequently became a prominent lawyer in Tallinn. Haim's wife was Sarah, nee Gloushkina. They had three daughters. She immigrated to Palestine in the 1930s and died there. I don't remember the name of the first daughter; the other two daughters were twins, Jenny and Doris. Bentsion was married to Tsipa, nee Bovshevar. Tsipa came from a very famous Jewish family. Her father and other relatives were rabbis, Jewish religious figures. Bentsion and Tsipa did not have children.

Rahil was married to a Jew from Tallinn named Rosenfeld. Their son Isai was born in 1919, their daughter Bella in 1920. Sarah's husband, Michel Auguston, was from Riga, after getting married Sarah lived in Riga. They had a son, Isai. All of them were married only to Jews, and had traditional Jewish weddings. All of them, but Sarah, lived in Tallinn.

The Estonian Jewish community of the 20th century was very strong and rich. Jews were always treated loyally in Estonia. Even when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, there were no Jewish pogroms, like in other places all over Russia [10](#). There was an admission quota for the Jews in higher education institutions in Tsarist Russia. The number of Jews in any university could not exceed 5 percent out of the overall number of students [11](#). There was no admission quota in Estonia. Not only Estonian Jews came to enter Tartu University, but also Jews from other regions of

Russia. They even came from Latvia, as there was an admission quota at Riga University.

There were several Jewish students' corporations [12](#) at Tartu University. There was a Jewish Students' Aid Fund [13](#). There were a lot of doctors, lawyers, teachers among Estonian Jews. Children's and youth Zionist organization were acting in tsarist times. Synagogues and prayer houses were built. Jewish schools, Jewish lyceums were open and the tsarist government was not in the way. The only restriction for the Jews was that they had no right to be officers in the army.

When Estonia gained independence, Jews became equal citizens of the country. The pale of settlement was abolished. There was no state anti-Semitism. There was barely any anti-Semitism in everyday life in Estonia. In 1926 Jews were granted cultural autonomy [14](#) by the Estonian government. It greatly influenced the further development of the Jewry in Estonia.

My parents met at charity ball in Tallinn. Such charity balls were held annually. They were arranged by the Jewish community of Tallinn, and numerous students' and Zionist organizations. Auctions and raffles were held there, and some things, like flowers, pastries were sold. Rich families contributed vases, jewelry and all kinds of things. They were sold at a much more expensive price and the earnings were donated for charity.

At that time mother's siblings lived in Tallinn and she often came from Narva to see them. Mother was a beauty. Grandmother said, when they were living in Narva, the infantry regiment of his Majesty Emperor was positioned there. All officers of the regiment came to have a look at Mother. Once, Mother was selling flowers at some charity event in Tallinn. Usually the most beautiful girls from Jewish families were invited to sell flowers and pastries. Father saw Mother and fell in love with her at first sight. Mother liked him, too.

I do not know how their relationship went, but they got married in 1924 in Tallinn. My parents were wed under the chuppah, in accordance with the Jewish rite. Probably we have Jewish traditions in our blood. After getting married, my mother moved to Tallinn from Narva. Shortly after the wedding Grandfather Itse-Shaye died. Then Grandmother Perle-Esse moved to Tallinn, where her children were living.

My parents rented an apartment on Suide Street. When I was born, our family moved to a four-room apartment in a two-story house on Kaupee Street in the center of Tallinn. Our family lived there until the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War [15](#). We left for evacuation from that house. I was born on 23rd February 1930. I was named Liya.

Father worked as a urologist. Mother was a housewife. It was not in connection with the fact that married Jewish women traditionally did not work, but took care of the house and children. At that time, young people did not adhere to that tradition. Many young women obtained higher education, got married and kept working. People with higher education were rather well-heeled and could afford maids, who took care of the household, and governesses for their children.

Mother was always rather feeble. In her adolescence she was afflicted with exophthalmic goiter. Soon her disease got so exacerbated, that mother was practically incapacitated. Of course she physically could not work. Mother was treated by renowned doctors. Father took her to spas in Italy, Switzerland, but there was no use in that. She felt a little better, but her disease was not cured.

It is not known to me whether when being a student Father was a member of any Zionist organization, but he was a convinced Zionist [16](#). Father contributed money as an aid to Palestine, and in 1933, Father, the husband of his sister Berta, and his relative David Gofstein went to help build Palestine for three years. It was not a duty or an order. Father thought it was a matter of honor to help Palestine. Jews from all over the world built Tel Aviv. Father, Roubinovich and Gofstein also took part in its construction, though by that time they were good experts in their field and respectable married men.

We had a real Jewish house, though my parents were not as religious as my grandparents. Both my parents and their numerous siblings sacredly observed Jewish traditions. Kashrut was observed at home. There were separate utensils for meat and dairy dishes, Paschal dishes, which were used only in the Paschal period. It was kept in a special cupboard and it was taken out only on the eve of Pesach, when the house was thoroughly cleaned and every day dishes were put away before the end of Pesach.

At home dishes of Jewish cuisine were cooked. I do not remember everything, but there were gefilte fish and hamantashen. Of course Sabbath was observed at home, and Jewish holidays were celebrated. Though, Father could not help working on Saturday as people could get sick anytime. If he was called to see a patient on Saturday, he never refused. On holidays Father always went to the synagogue. We marked Jewish holidays at home in accordance with the rite. During holidays our family went to see my maternal grandmother.

I don't remember if our family celebrated Estonian state holidays. The only thing I remember is that on Estonian Independence day the state flag was hung. I was born on 23rd February and the Independence Day was on 24th February, so I remembered it.

I had a nanny in early childhood, who spoke German, therefore the first words spoken by me were in German. In general, our family spoke several languages. Since childhood Father spoke Yiddish and German. Father was proficient in German as he had studied in Germany for several years. My parents spoke only Yiddish with each other and my grandmothers. Mother preferred Russian to German as she grew up in Belarus, then in Narva, and the latter bordered on Russia. The majority of the population there spoke Russian. Thus, I spoke German with Father, and Russian with Mother. I played with Estonian children in the yard, so I quickly picked up Estonian. My parents were also fluent in Estonian. It was natural for us. One could not live in the country without knowing its language. When I grew up, my nanny left her job and I was taught by a governess.

We had a large four-room apartment. Father made a lot of money, so we were well-off. Mother often went abroad with some of our relatives. My parents did not buy expensive furniture. There were not inclined to buy things, which were too conspicuous. In 1939 Father bought a car. At that time it was a rare thing, but he did it to please Mother. Besides, he had to visit patients at night at times, and so a car was very handy.

On weekends we went out of town and spent time on the coast and in the forest. It was safe to live in Tallinn. Life was calm. People could go out any time of the day, even in pitch dark night and there was nothing to fear. There were constables on duty for twenty-four hours. They were riding along the streets and made sure that there was order. People were different at that time. They used to respect people around them.

I loved reading since childhood. I learned how to read long before school, and was glued to books. I read in Estonian and Russian. My parents bought me books for children. In 1938 I went to a private Estonian lyceum. I did well. There were three Jewish girls in my class, including me. Teachers and students treated us well, and we did not feel 'strange' and 'foreign.' One of the girls in my class was shot by Germans in Tallinn in 1941, the other one is still alive. There were Jews Estonians, Russians among my lyceum friends.

By the way, when Mother finished lyceum she kept in touch with her friends from lyceum. They often came to see her in Tallinn. Her bosom friends were two Russian women, Zoya and Vera Luzhkova. My chum was an Estonian girl, who lived in our house. We went to and back home from the lyceum together.

I remember in 1940 Soviet troops entered Tallinn [see Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [17](#). There were tanks, trucks with soldiers and people on the curbs throwing flowers at them. It was peaceful. Maybe my parents discussed it, but not in my presence. They did not express things that children were not supposed to hear. It seems to me at that time adults did not discuss their matters in the presence of children. I had my own room and I spent my time there reading.

Father kept his previous job, and remained untouched. Our lyceum was renamed into school and we kept studying the way we did. Father's brothers Solomon and Boris suffered. Solomon owned a store, and Boris ran Grandfather's store after his death. He had worked there as an accountant when Grandfather was alive. Both stores were taken over and nationalized by the Soviet regime. First, commissars [18](#) were assigned to the stores, who watched the work process and got familiarized with the course of business. Then the owners were ousted.

Uncle Boris had other troubles beside that. On 14th June 1941, when the Soviet regime was involved with mass deportation of Estonian citizens [19](#), Boris and his family were deported. Boris was charged with being a bourgeois, an 'enemy of the people' [20](#), and sent to the Gulag [21](#), and his family was exiled to Kermez, Kirov oblast.

Hardly had we got over the shock in connection with the deportation of Uncle Boris's family, another tribulation came on 22nd June 1941: we found out about the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. Molotov [22](#) held a speech which was broadcast on the radio and informed that Germany had attacked Soviet Union without having declared war. The battles were held in frontier towns.

My parents were very worried. Father decided that all of us ought to get evacuated. Unfortunately, not all of our relatives were of that opinion. My maternal grandmother Gute-Mere was very sick and could not leave. Aunt Rosa, with whom Grandmother was living, could not let her stay alone. Rosa and her husband stayed in Tallinn, her daughters Natalia and Tamara were evacuated. Father's brother Solomon, Mother's elder brother Shmuel-Sakhne stayed in Tallinn, too. Both of their sons were drafted into the army. Solomon's daughter Miriam was enrolled in the lines as a volunteer. Mother's sister Sarah Auguston and her husband did not manage to get evacuated from Riga. Her son Isai was drafted into the army. The rest of our relatives were evacuated.

Unfortunately, many friends and pals of my parents stayed in Tallinn. People were daunted with deportation and feared the Soviet regime more than the fascists. Besides, the local population treated Germans as vernacular, as Germans always lived in Estonia. Nobody expected the

Germans to do harm and exterminate Jews. Maybe some people were merely sluggish. It was easier not to take any actions, just stay than going towards uncertainty.

We were evacuated on 3rd July 1941. The husband of Father's sister Sarah Klas was working for the militia and he had a permit to enter the territory of the Soviet Union, but it was not of great essence as the trains were ready to leave and those who wanted to go into evacuation, could get on them.

I vaguely remember our departure for evacuation. I remember vividly how we went across Narva Bridge. There was a raid of German aviation. The bridge was being bombed and we were scared. I was afraid that the bridge would explode when our train was to cross it. We were lucky to cross the bridge. Then there was a monotonous trip. We were on the road for a long time. There were occasional bombings. It took us a long time to get to the station Uvelka of Chelyabinsk oblast. We did not stay there for a long time. There was an evacuation point in Uvelka, wherefrom we were sent to Kopeysk, Chelyabinsk oblast [about 1500 km from Moscow].

We were housed in the barrack for evacuees in one room with Father's sister Sarah Klas and her daughter Irene. Father was mobilized in the evacuation hospital, as he was a doctor. People who were severely wounded were brought from front-line hospitals in sanitary train and taken to the evacuation hospital. People who had light and medium injuries, were treated on spot, but those who had serious wounds and required complicated operations and long treatment were taken from the front line to evacuation hospitals. There was a hospital in Kopeysk, and Father could come home overnight. Mother could not work.

When schooling began, I went to the local school. I did not feel anti-Semitism there. I was treated in a good way. We took two suitcases of clothes with us. Almost all things were stolen from one of them, but still something was left. Mother took warm clothes for me. I went to school in a woolen skirt and shirt and I looked different than the local children. I was even teased 'woolen factory.' Locals were very poor and there was a vast difference in our outfits.

It was not the only difference between us. Our upbringing and mentality also differed. It was hard to get used to the fact that a person could promise something and not keep it without any serious grounds, but simply because of forgetting about his promise. We were taught since childhood that promises must be kept. People did not keep promises, but they were very kind. Russians are very good and sympathetic. They treated us very well and with empathy since we had to leave everything and flee from the Germans.

Of course, it was easier for our family as compared to others. We knew the language. It did not matter that we had an accent and did not speak clearly, but we could speak. It was probably easier for me than for my parents, as children easily adjust to new environment, and accept it right away. I became a pioneer [23](#) at school. I also took it naturally.

In spring and fall all school children were sent to the field during the season. It was new for me. I was not used to that. I saw what others were doing and copied them. I even liked physical work. In spring we planted cabbage seeds and weeded. Then we did harvesting. I remember how all of us were told to pick potatoes from the field. We were working all day long. My cousin Irene and I had to take the horse-drawn cart and take out potatoes from the field, filling that cart. I recall the steppe, night, gleaming spots of light. It came from the wolves. Their eyes were sparkling in the

dark. We were frightened of course. My cousin ran to the village to ask for help, and I stayed with the horses by myself. I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was so scared! We were unscathed.

All of us received food cards [24](#). We could get bread, some cereal and a little bit of oil. In general, all evacuees were in the same boat. I cannot say that I was hungry. We understood that there was a war and everybody was destitute. It was shameful to complain of one's life. We got by with the things we got on our cards.

Life was hard on my mother. She was unwell and she had to do work about the house. She had to bring water from the well, stoke the stove. At first we did not even know how to do that, but we were learning gradually. It appears to me there is no way out, you learn easily in necessity.

We were looking forward to come back home. We listened in rounds-up on the radio, read newspapers, hoped to get word of the liberation of Estonia. We wrote letters to Tallinn, Riga, and hoped that somebody would respond us. We did not know at that time, that the Germans murdered all Jews in Estonia, Latvia. They did not respond to us and we comforted ourselves with the idea that they might have moved to another place.

When the battles for liberation of Estonia started, we were waiting for daily messages on the course of battles and were happy to hear that the Estonian Corps [25](#) had fought back part of the Estonian land. My cousin Miriam was in the Estonian Corps. She went through entire war. Isai Rosenfeld, the son of mother's sister Rahil was also in Estonian corps. The son of mother's sister Sarah Auguston was in the lines of the Latvian division [26](#). We received their letters from the front.

The evacuees were rejoicing, when we heard that Estonia had been liberated from fascists it was like a holiday for the evacuees. Everybody congratulated each other, rejoiced thinking that soon we would have a chance to go back home. Father went to the Estonian representative office in Leningrad. Shortly upon his arrival, we started packing. All of us, who were evacuated from Estonia to Kopeysk, came back home on one train. My cousins, who were in the lines survived. They came back home. After war Isai Rosenfeld stayed in the army for a while. He was a military commandant in the German city Zwickau.

We came back to Tallinn, but it was not the place we saw when we were leaving. A lot of houses were destroyed and the shambles were still there. In 1944 the large Tallinn synagogue burned down during bombing. There was no light in the streets, and in the evening it was hard to walk around in the darkness. But all of us were at home, and that feeling could not be compared to anything.

Our house was not destroyed. We settled in our apartment, which was not occupied by anybody. Our relatives, who were coming back from evacuation, stayed in our place. Many of them had nowhere to go as either their apartments were destroyed or their houses were occupied by other citizens. There were a lot of people, but we did not feel any discomfort. We had lived in a wooden barrack for four years and were able to survive, what could we be talking now!

All of us, even I, a child, changed our views and we perceived things differently after evacuation. We were not obsessed by recollections of the good prewar times, we were just living. Food cards were used until 1947. We managed to get food somehow. Besides, there was a market, where we could buy some products. We were not picky. We were happy with what we had, and were not

thinking of things we would like ... Thank God we came back home safe and the most dreadful was behind.

In Tallinn we found out about the extermination of Jews in Estonia, concentration camps, executions in Tallinn prison. All our relatives, who were staying in Tallinn, perished. Grandmother Gute-Mere was shot. Aunt Rosa with her husband, Solomon with wife and mother's elder brother Shmuel-Sakhne with wife.

We knew that Mother's sister Sarah Auguston, who lived in Riga, and her husband did not manage to leave for evacuation on time. They happened to be in Riga ghetto [27](#). We could not get information on them, but we understood that they were not alive. Suddenly, we got a letter from Isai, Sarah's son, where he said that Sarah was alive and had come back to Riga. Her husband was shot in Riga ghetto, but Sarah was sent to the Kaiserwald concentration camp [28](#), wherefrom she was sent to a concentration camp in Germany. She was liberated there by the troops of the allies. Sarah came back home. She walked across Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. She was the only one from our family, who managed to survive during the German occupation.

Then we found out more about the atrocities of the fascists. During the first postwar years in Tallinn there were actions taken. The graves of those who were executed in Klooga [29](#) and other concentration camps, were dug up and lists of those who perished in occupation were made.

After the war there were no Jewish schools in Tallinn. There were Russian and Estonian schools. Before the war I went to an Estonian lyceum. Since I went to Russian school in Ural, I went to Russian compulsory school in Tallinn. There were new subjects in school: history of the KPSS, history of the Soviet Union. I joined the Komsomol [30](#) at school. We had mandatory events: subbotniks [31](#), pioneer and Komsomol meetings. We did not think over it, there was no brainwashing in connection with the latter. We knew that we were supposed to do that.

Anti-Semitism appeared after war. Though, we personally did not feel it. We merely knew that there was a biased opinion against Jews. Our acquaintances told us about it.

In 1948 the state of Israel was founded [32](#). It was a great joy for all of us. My father, who had been involved in the construction of Tel Aviv for three years, was really happy for the Jews, who finally had their own land, their own country. At that time the Soviet regime treated Israel loyally, and as a matter of fact, the Soviet Union was the first country that facilitated the foundation of the state of Israel. In a while the attitude towards Israel drastically changed. At that time official mass media called Israel an aggressor and the Israeli army - the winner of the Six-Day War [33](#) and the Yom Kippur War [34](#) - bandits and occupants. We rejoiced in the victories of Israel, and its calamities were our calamities.

Father worked in the students' policlinic of Tallinn Polytechnic University, first as a therapist and then as a member of the medical examination board. He retired at the age of 75. The nurses liked him very much. In general he was loved by the entire personnel of the hospital. He was a very good doctor and a very good man.

Father was not affected by the Doctors' Plot' [35](#), which commenced in January 1953. He kept on working and the patients made appointments with him beforehand. It was much easier in Estonia as compared to other parts of the Soviet Union. Local authorities were able to smooth over the

situation. Everything was quiet. Though, there were rumors that the trains were ready for deportation of all Jews to Siberia. I think it was not just mere talking, as there is no smoke without fire.

We were lucky that Stalin died in March 1953 and life was calmer. It was the time when the Jews said: if someone was against our peoples, he would end in disgrace. Now I understood that Stalin's death was for the better, but at that time I burst into tears and could not calm down. I was a student of the Riga Teachers' Training Institute and came home on holidays. I was so befuddled with propaganda: 'Stalin is the father of all peoples,' 'Stalin is our leader and teacher,' that I sincerely believed in that. There was Stalin's portrait in each classroom and a large Stalin bust in the assembly hall. All my postwar school years went by under Stalin's portrait. I hung his portrait on the wall in my room at home. I remember Father looked at it ironically, but Stalin was an idol for us.

Of course, my parents perceived Stalin's personality in a different way. Only once Father told me that one day I would understand who Stalin really was. My parents were very skeptical to my sobbing and lamentation in connections with Stalin's death. I understood that Father was right only after Khrushchev's speech [36](#) at the Twentieth Party Congress [37](#). I did not doubt his words. All of us saw how people were deported from Estonia on 14th June 1941 only for the reason that they achieved such a living wage owing to their intelligence and work. How could they be sent to the camp for that? They did not rob, plunder, they worked, and mostly several generations worked to provide welfare for the family.

Some of those who were exiled managed to come back home. But almost all of those who were in the camps perished. After the party congress it seemed to us that our life would be freer, and many of the artificial Soviet bans and restrictions would be abolished in our life. Soon, our illusions were dispersed. Anti-Semitism and our isolation from the rest of the world were still there. The only thing was there were no mass repressions.

My parents and our kin kept on observing Jewish traditions. At that time the Soviet regime began struggling against religion [38](#). We understood that Father should not go to the synagogue, but no regime could ban marking Jewish holidays at home!

My grandmother was the most ardent stickler for Jewish traditions in our family. All I know about Jewry is from her. She always made the family get together on Jewish holidays. Grandmother cooked Jewish dishes and did other things in accordance with the tradition. She even baked matzah and challot herself, if she could not buy them. All generation of our huge family got together—children, grandchildren. Now it seems a dream. I remember how all of us rejoiced in family reunions, celebration of the holidays. We came to see Grandmother on the day-off. We danced, sang, chatted. Grandmother was a pivot of our family, keeping all of us together. When Grandmother died in 1970, there were no family gatherings like when she was alive. Some of the people left, others died... Neither Epsteins nor Levins stayed.

I often recall Grandmother's cozy apartment, full of my relatives, when I am passing by her house. Now that small two-story house is squeezed between new multi-story buildings. Probably it will be demolished soon and a new multi-story building will be constructed in its place. Once I could not help walking to the apartment where my grandmother used to live. There was some office there and I asked for permission to stay there for a little bit.

We did not mark Soviet holidays at home. Those, who were working, were to attend festive demonstrations on 1st May, 7th November [39](#) with their organization. For us Soviet holidays were ordinary days-off.

My father wanted me to become a doctor. He talked me into entering the Medical department of Tartu University when I finished school. I was always afraid of blood and the mere thought of it made me sick. Father persistently said that it was a trifle and I would get use to that. When I finished school, I firmly told my father that I would never become a doctor. I understood, if I stayed in Tallinn, Father would keep convincing me to study medicine. I had penchants for languages and I decided to enter the Philology Department.

At that time Jews from all over the Soviet Union came to enter Tartu University. It was easier for Jews to enter in Tartu than in any other city of the USSR – as there was no anti-Semitism at Tartu University. The only criteria considered were the results of exams. They did not try to cut Jews at the exams and were totally unbiased towards them. Even many professors came to Tartu from the Soviet Union. The entire pleiades of young scientists, who could find a job, came to Tartu and became professors at the university, scientists who were internationally recognized.

As a philologist I remember Yuri Lotman [40](#), who could not find a job in his native Leningrad. Not only Lotman benefited by accepting an offer from Tartu University, but the university as well. Tartu University offered job to a lot of people like Lotman, both mathematicians and physicians and other intellectual people. Of course, I ought to go to Tartu. Having felt no anti-Semitism in our postwar Tallinn and having forgotten about my nationality, I went to Leningrad University. It was a protest against father's plans of making a doctor out of me. Of courses, I did not pass entrance exams in Leningrad. From there I left for Riga, where mother's sister Sarah Auguston and her son Isai were living. I passed exams in Riga Teachers' Training Institute, Philological Department. I was specialized in Russian language and philology. I lived with aunt Sarah. I did not feel anti-Semitism, when I was a student. Both teachers and students treated me loyally. My friends were Russians, Letts.

When I graduated from the institute I got a mandatory job assignment [41](#) to teach Russian language and literature at Tallinn Accounting College. Of course, I was happy to come back home. I worked in that college for several years, and it was closed down and all teachers were transferred to an Estonian compulsory school. Being a school teacher is hard even for those who like their profession. It was like an incessant horror for me. At college the students were more grown-up and they were aware that they ought to study. It was hard for me to work with schoolchildren. I came home emaciated and I had to check the papers and get ready for the next day's classes. I spent more time on the discipline in the classroom than on teaching.

I worked at school for 14 years, and understood that I could not go on with that any more. I saw a job opening in Tallinn conservatoire. They needed a teacher of Russian language and literature. Eight people were applying for that position, but I was selected. I worked there for 21 years. My students were adults and they were willing to study and found the classes interesting. It made me happy and I tried finding challenging materials for my classes and got ready for each class as if it was an exam. The students loved me. Even now, when I see my students in the street, they are thanking me for my classes, which they were pleased with. Of course, I am happy to hear it.

When I was working at school, Father convinced me to finish the English Department of Tallinn Teachers' Training Institute extramurally. I was angry and said that I was not willing to study. Father used to say, 'Learn, while you are alive, then you will appreciate my words.' It was hard to study, but now I am very happy that Father convinced me to study. If the language is not used, it is easy to forget it, but still my reading and listening comprehension skills are good and my speaking skills are basic. I regret not to have studied French with Father's sister Sarah Klas, who studied at the Sorbonne and was proficient in French. Though, it was in my childhood, if I was more mature I would welcome such an opportunity. It is so good to know any language!

I did not join the Party. In spite of the fact of being a teacher, which was an ideological position, I could obviate it. The school's political officer told me couple of times that I should join the Party since I was supposed to raise my students in accordance with the communist ideology. I used to say that the best of the best were supposed to be in the Party and I did not deserve it. Every time we talked about it, I would say that I was not ready. The political officer did not insist, just made suggestions. There was a more loyal attitude toward this issue in our republic as compared to other ones in the USSR.

In the late 1960s the Soviet regime permitted Jews to leave the USSR for permanent abode in Israel. Many of our relatives immigrated. The daughter of Father's sister Berta Roubinovich is living in America. The twins Jenny and Doris, the daughters of Mother's brother Haim Levin, immigrated to Israel. They are still living there with their families. The daughter of mother's sister Rahil Rosenfeld Bella is residing in Israel. Their family is Orthodox. They have two sons and 15 grandchildren. Bella's brother, Isai Rosenfeld, also lived Israel. He passed away in 1996.

My favorite cousin Isai Auguston and his wife are living in Cleveland, USA. Isai left Latvia, when it became independent [see Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic] [42](#). It was not their choice. Their children were leaving, and Isai with his wife did not want to part with them. Now Isai and his wife are living in the seniors' community in Cleveland. Isai is nostalgic about his home, Riga. He often writes me in his letters: 'Feel happy, that you never got to immigrate, have your own apartment, vernacular walls, chance to walk along native streets ... You do not have a disease called nostalgia, for which there is no cure. Rejoice in every day you spend at home.'

At his age, it is hard to change your mode of life, you whereabouts. The older the man, the harder it is for him to find new friends and adapt to a new life style. Besides, Isai is a very active man, it is hard for him to loiter. He is a historian. He was a history teacher, one of the founders of the Jewish school in Riga. When he retired, Isai founded the Museum of Latvian Defense in Riga. He visited places, liberated by the Latvian division, gathered documents, photographs and it appealed to him. If he found things to do in Cleveland, he would not suffer from nostalgia.

My father was happy to have an opportunity to leave for Israel. He, a Zionist, thought Israel to be the symbol of revival of the Jewry, the dreamland. I was also willing to leave. Unfortunately, we could not do that because of Mother. She was very sick and the doctors prohibited her to change climate. There was no way we could leave Mother here.

We lived in our house on Kaupmei Street for 20 years, until 1975. Then it was made into an office and we were offered another apartment. We moved there with my parents. I have been living here by myself since my parents died. The house, where I spent my childhood, is still there. There were different offices in that house, even Sochnut [43](#). I often passed by it and could not believe it was for

real. What happened, or had not happened. What is going on? I am looking at the windows and recall: this is my room, here is Father's study. I spent my childhood here. We left that house for evacuation and came back here after the war. This house keeps the memories of my childhood, my young and happy parents. The past vanished into thin air. Life went by, but the house is still there.

A few of my cousins stayed in Tallinn. Both daughters of Rosa Klompus, Natalia and Tamara, died of cancer. The daughter of Moses Epstein, my father's brother, Anna Exton, was a famous ballet-dancer in Estonia. Now she is the director of the Tallinn choreography school. The grandson of Father's sister Sarah Klas, the son of Irene, Michael Belinson lives in Tallinn. He is the headmaster of our Jewish school. Irene's brother Lazar died. My cousin Miriam Arounum, the daughter of Father's brother Solomon lives in Tallinn. She is 86. Simon Levin, the son of mother's elder brother Shmuel-Sakhne, who perished during occupation, followed in the footsteps of his father. His is a famous attorney in Estonia. His younger brother Alexander is a mathematics teacher.

In 1984 my mother passed away, and in a year Father died. Both of them were buried in Tallinn Jewish cemetery. I have a plot left for myself next to them. I even had the stone set up with my name, Liya Epshteyn. My date of birth is engraved already, and the date of my death will be when I die.

In 1985 I turned 55. In accordance with the Soviet law women can retire at that age. They did not hold me up at work saying that there are a lot of unemployed young teachers. Of course, now I look at it differently, but I was really worried at that time. When my parents died, I was scared to stay alone in that empty apartment. I was offered a job as an assessor in the peoples' court. I was not paid much, but it was OK combined with my pension. I worked there until the age of 65, as then I was not to resign in accordance with the legislation. People over 65 could work for the state.

In the period of independence of Estonia [44](#), all employees were supposed to know the state language, that is, Estonian. The employees at the court knew me very well and treated me fairly. They recommended me for a position of an Estonian teacher in the Tallinn municipal prison. I was supposed to teach the staff of the prison. Now this prison is a museum, but at that time it was a real prison, located in the old fortress. There was an air of despondence. I got unwell. When the doctors said that I had an oncological disease, I left work. Soon, my position was downsized.

I went to Israel in 1990. My aunt Rahil and her husband were still alive. Their family immigrated to Israel in the 1970s and we met after almost 20 years of separation. We were so happy to see each other. My cousin Bella and her sons invited me to come for a visit. I traveled all over the country and saw a lot. I was greatly impressed by Israel. This is a country, where each stone is breathing with history. I liked the people living there. They love their country and work on its thriving and fight for it! Let God send peace to this land, let there be no bloodshed and death of people.

I found out about my disease in 1998, and in 1999 I underwent a very serious operation. I feel fine, though I am living as if on a volcano, thinking what will happen next. I went through chemotherapy after the operation and it was hard on me. I was totally helpless, could not do anything. I was greatly assisted by the Jewish community of Estonia [45](#). The nurse came over, brought me products, cooked for me and cleaned the apartment. I would not have made it if not for the community. It took time for me to recuperate; I do not even want to recollect it.

In such a hard time for me I understood a very simple verity: there is nothing more important than life and we have to rejoice in every day we live. I was as if reborn after my operation and understood that there were truly important things to ponder over, without focusing on trifles. I knew I had to do my best to get better. Sometimes I hear the conversation of the ladies in the community and they make me laugh: Dear God, they are talking about the lunch served today!

Now I think differently. When I was about to be operated, I was not sure if I would walk out the hospital. Now I look and feel better than most of my coevals, who consider themselves healthy. Your life makes you understand things. There are only two ways - keep to bed and tell oneself that life is over, or fight for one's health. There are no relatives left. There is nobody to look after me. I do not want and I cannot be a burden for anyone. The medicine is expensive. It is hard to get to the doctors.

I try to be healthy myself. I strive to take walks more often, go to the community for physical training classes, swim in the sea until the temperature goes down to 13°C. When it gets colder, I do not feel like swimming, but I am forcing myself to. Every morning I pour cold water on me. It is hard for me to get used to that, and now I take such treatments not as a necessity, but as pleasure.

I try not to take pills, and if needed I take herbal treatment. I feel healthy and brisk. The only thing I understood that I should not make are long-term plans and worry about things which may take place in a year or two. One should live the present day, the present hour and find joy even in little godsend. There are enough joyful moments in our life, we just should strive to see them. We should learn how to rejoice in a sunny day, first spring flowers, red foliage in fall. We should love all surrounding us, and love ourselves, and only then we have the harmony, and no malady.

There was a period of time when I gave private classes in Estonian. My life was hard from a material standpoint, and that extra money was very handy. Now our government raised pensions and I decided to give up private lessons and live for myself. There was a time when I taught our rabbi Estonian. Now he has another teacher. The Jewish community helps me a lot. Once a week I get products. The community pays for my medical insurance. The Estonian government highly esteems the Jewish community and it is also respected by foreign sponsors. They take care of us, the elderly. I do not feel lonely owing to the community. I celebrate all Jewish holidays there. I feel that I am taken care of by the community and it is very important for a lonely person to know that someone remembers about you and cares.

Mr. Kofkin, a Jew from Tallinn, is helping our community a lot. He is currently residing in Switzerland. He established the fund of the Kofkin family. Thanks to that fund our community can help lonely elderly people and develop programs for young people. He is a very kind man. It is not enough to be rich, one should also know how to share his riches with those who were and are not as lucky in this life. Thanks to Kofkin our community will pay for a four-day trip in November of four lonely people to Toivo. I could never even dream of such a vacation. It is a very expensive resort. Last year we went to a trout place. It was a very scenic place in the forest. We were treated to trout there. These are the presents of our community.

When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991 I took it as conformity. In the West, the Soviet Union was called empire of wickedness and I agree with this definition. It seems to me that the process of the breakup of such a huge empire into independent countries could have been made in a gentler and less painful way to people. But it happened in such a way that all those processes impacted lives of

many people and broke many people's lives.

At any rate, things could have been less rough in such a small country as Estonia. It seems to me our government made a mistake in the first years of independence. When they came to power, the non-Estonian population in Estonia was more than a third, made up of those who came from the USSR. Many people settled in Estonia after war and many people came here in the 1980s in connection with the construction of the Olympic center in Tallinn. Most of those people did not even know that prior to 1940 Estonia was an independent state. In the euphoria of independence, people forgot about that mass of people. They were called occupants, immigrants and demanded that they should learn the state language –Estonian, or leave the country. I think our present problems stem from that approach.

It should have been explained to that mass of Russians that now it was an independent country, with Estonian being the state language and everything would be in that language, and give those people five years to study the language, let them work, study the language and take the exam in Estonian citizenship in five years. I think this approach to be right – even if a person does not know the language, he is a valuable asset, and why should the state lose that asset in the period of this person studying the language, if his knowledge and experience could be used for the benefit of the country. I think it is a constructive approach.

And what do we currently have? People who did not know the language were fired. Many people did not know the language, as Russian was the state language in the Soviet Union. People were at a loss, having no idea what to do. As a result, the best people, qualified experts, left the country as they there was a demand for them in other place. The country lost people, who might have done something precious for the country. Now they are thinking, started teaching the language to those who wish. There are state language courses, though they are very expensive. If a person passes exam, he is refunded half of the paid amount.

Of course, I disapprove of people who are living in the country without knowing its language at least on a day-to-day level, but still they should be given a chance to work and learn the language. That is why we have so many homeless people and vagrants. If a person lost his job, how would he pay for his apartment? So, he would lose it as well.

There is another example. The veterans of the Soviet Army, who liberated Estonia from fascists, are considered to be occupants. There is a monument in the center of Tallinn, devoted to a Soviet soldier/liberator. They are demanding to take it away, but those people did not spare their lives to oust the fascists from our land, and now they are blamed. Those things speak of the aggression on both sides. There is a reason for everything.

There are very few of us, indigenous Tallinn Jews. Even if we are not acquainted, we recognize and greet each other. They say that our Estonian Jews, and the Jews who came from the Soviet Union, are completely different in mentality, views and upbringing. Yes, we, local Jews, have different views on certain things, as compared to the Jews, who came from the Soviet Union, but there is no vast difference between us. It all depends on a person. We merely should know how to have a worthy and tactful demeanor, respect somebody else's life, other people's opinion and there would be no misconceptions. All of us are equal, all of us are Jews. We have to be one family. In good families people know how to get over misunderstandings peacefully, with love and respect for each other.

Glossary:

1 Cantonist

The cantonists were Jewish children who were conscripted to military institutions in tsarist Russia with the intention that the conditions in which they were placed would force them to adopt Christianity. Enlistment for the cantonist institutions was most rigorously enforced in the first half of the 19th century. It was abolished in 1856 under Alexander II. Compulsory military service for Jews was introduced in 1827. Jews between the age of 12 and 25 could be drafted and those under 18 were placed in the cantonist units. The Jewish communal authorities were obliged to furnish a certain quota of army recruits. The high quota that was demanded, the severe service conditions, and the knowledge that the conscript would not observe Jewish religious laws and would be cut off from his family, made those liable for conscription try to evade it. Thus, the communal leaders filled the quota from children of the poorest homes.

2 Nikolai's army

Soldier of the tsarist army during the reign of Nicholas I when the draft lasted for 25 years.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Tallinn Synagogue

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

6 Bolsheviks

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

7 White Guards

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

8 Estonian War of Liberation (1918-1920)

The Estonian Republic fought on its own territory against Soviet Russia whose troops were advancing from the east. On Latvian territory the Estonian People's Army fought against the Baltic Landswehr's army formed of German volunteers. The War of Liberation ended by the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty on 2nd February 1920, when Soviet Russia recognized Estonia as an independent state.

9 First Estonian Republic

Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918, they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918.

10 Pogroms in Ukraine

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

11 Five percent quota

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

total number of students.

12 Jewish Students' corporations in Tartu

Although the Judaism Department of Tartu University was founded only in 1936, students of Jewish origin studied in Tartu University since the end of the 19th century, and they had their associations and corporations. The student's money box was established in 1874, and in 1884 the academic society with the name of Akademischer Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur (Jewish Academic Society of History and Literature). Jewish students formed the 'Hacfiro' society. There were two corporations: 'Limuvia' and 'Hasmonea.' The 'Limuvia' was a secular organization, and the 'Hasmonea' was Zionist oriented. Since there were relatively few numbers of Jewish students at the university, their organizations were small. In 1934 the Academic Society listed 10 members, the 'Hacfiro' - 20, 'Limuvia' - 43, and the 'Hasmonea' - 30 members. The societies owned large libraries: the 'Limuvia' had about 3,500, the 'Hasmonea' - 1,000, the Academic society 2,000, and the 'Hacfiro' had 300 volumes. Jewish students also had a cash box. This was the first Jewish students' organization in Estonia. The purpose of the cash box was to support Jewish students from poor families. Wealthy Jewish families made annual contributions to the fund, and the board distributed the amounts among needy students. All those organizations were closed down with the outbreak of WWII.

13 Jewish Students' Aid Fund

was founded in Tartu in 1875. It was the first Jewish Students' Organization in Estonia. The aid fund was meant for Jewish students from poor families. Rich Jewish families made annually contributions into the aid fund and the donations were distributed between poor students by the board of the Students' Aid Fund. In the 1930s the activity of the Aid Fund was highly appreciated by the rector of Tartu University.

14 Jewish Cultural Autonomy

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

15 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.

16 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.

17 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.

18 Political officer

These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

19 Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)

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

and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

20 Enemy of the people

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

21 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

22 Molotov, V

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

23 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.

24 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.

25 Estonian Rifle Corps

Military unit established in late 1941 as a part of the Soviet Army. The Corps was made up of two

rifle divisions. Those signed up for the Estonian Corps by military enlistment offices were ethnic Estonians regardless of their residence within the Soviet Union as well as men of call-up age residing in Estonia before the Soviet occupation (1940). The Corps took part in the bloody battle of Velikiye Luki (December 1942 - January 1943), where it suffered great losses and was sent to the back areas for re-formation and training. In the summer of 1944, the Corps took part in the liberation of Estonia and in March 1945 in the actions on Latvian territory. In 1946, the Corps was disbanded.

26 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 12th 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 20th December 1941 till 14th 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.

27 Riga ghetto

Established on 23rd August 1941, located in the suburb of Riga populated by poor Jews. About 13,000 people resided here before the occupation, and about 30,000 inmates were kept in the ghetto. On 31st November and 8th December 1941 most inmates were killed in the Rumbula forest. On 31st October 15,000 inmates were shot, on 8th December 10 000 inmates were killed. Only younger men were kept alive to do hard work. After the bigger part of the ghetto population was exterminated, a smaller ghetto was established in December 1941. The majority of inmates of this 'smaller ghetto' were Jews, brought from the Reich and Western Europe. On 2nd November 1943 the ghetto was closed. The survivors were taken to nearby concentration camps. In 1944 the remaining Jews were taken to Germany, where few of them survived.

28 Kaiserwald concentration camp

Kaiserwald was the old German name of the Mezapark area of Riga. In summer 1943 Himmler ordered to eliminate all camps in the east, exterminate all inmates who were unable to work, and take the rest to another concentration camp. In summer 1943 prisoners from Polish concentration camps started building the camps. The 'Riga-Kaiserwald' had 29 'Aussenlager' (sub-camps); the sorting out took place in the central camp. The male inmates who were able to work were sent to clear fields from mines. In August and September 1944, when the Soviet armies advanced to the Baltic countries, some inmates were sent to the Stutthof camp near Gdansk, and about 400 inmates were sent to Auschwitz. The rest were executed on 2nd October 1944 during elimination of the camp. From Stutthof the inmates were taken to various camps. The ally armies rescued them from extermination. At the most 1 000 Latvian Jews taken to Germany lived till liberation. The total of 18,000 Jews were exterminated in Kaizerwald during the Great Patriotic War.

29 Klooga

Subcamp of the Vaivara camp in Estonia, set up in 1943 and one of the largest camps in the country. Most of the prisoners came from the Vilnius ghetto; they worked under extreme conditions. There were 3,000 to 5,000 inmates kept in the Klooga camp. It was eliminated together with all of its inmates in spring 1944, before the advance by the Soviet army.

30 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 uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

31 Subbotnik (Russian for Saturday)

The practice of subbotniks, or 'Communist Saturdays', was introduced in the USSR in the 1920s. It meant unpaid voluntary work after regular working hours on Saturday.

32 Creation of the State of Israel

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

33 Six-Day-War

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

34 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)

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

35 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

36 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.

37 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.

38 Struggle against religion

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

39 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great

October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

40 Lotman, Yuri (1922-1993)

One of the greatest semioticians and literary scholars. In 1950 he received his degree from the Philology Department of Leningrad University but was unable to continue with his post-graduate studies as a result of the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' and the wave of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Lotman managed to find a job in Tartu, Estonia. Starting in 1950, he taught Russian literature at Tartu University, and from 1960-77 he was the head of the Department of Russian Literature. He did active research work and is the author of over 800 books and academic articles on the history of Russian literature and public thought, on literary theory, on the history of Russian culture, and on semiotics. He was an elected member of the British Royal Society, Norwegian Royal Academy, and many other academic societies.

41 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.

42 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic

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

43 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million

new immigrants.

44 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic

According to the referendum conducted in the Baltic Republics in March 1991, 77.8 percent of participating Estonian residents supported the restoration of Estonian state independence. On 20th August 1991, at the time of the coup attempt in Moscow, the Estonian Republic's Supreme Council issued the Decree of Estonian Independence. On 6th September 1991, the USSR's State Council recognized full independence of Estonia, and the country was accepted into the UN on 17th September 1991.

45 Estonian Jewish Community

On 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, a resolution was made to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first independent Jewish cultural organization in the USSR to be officially registered by the Soviet authorities. In 1989 the first Ivrit courses started, although the study of Ivrit was equal to Zionist propaganda and considered to be anti-Soviet activity. Contacts with Jewish organizations of other countries were established. KJCE was part of the Peoples' Front of Estonia, struggling for an independent state. In December 1989 the first issue of the KJCE paper Kashachar (Dawn) was published in Estonian and Russian language. In 1991 the first radio program about Jewish culture and activities of KJCE, 'Sholem Aleichem,' was broadcast in Estonia. In 1991 the Jewish religious community and KJCE had a joined meeting, where it was decided to found the Jewish Community of Estonia.