

Anatoly Lifshits

I met Anatoly Lifshits in his cosy apartment in the city centre where he lives together with his wife Lubov Mironovna.

Anatoly Lifshits is a man of courage. He survived the ordeals of war. But in his life he had to exhibit not only military, but also civil bravery.

Anatoly Lifshits has kept surprising memory and we can only be envious of his wit and clarity of thought.

He is a gifted story-teller with rich and flexible language. A meeting with such a person can be considered pennies from heaven.

I hope that readers of this interview will manage to estimate Anatoly Lifshits at his true worth.

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My family background

Unfortunately I started to be interested in history of our family (especially in origin of my parents) rather late. When it became interesting to me, there was already nobody to ask. But nevertheless I remember some facts.

My mother was the youngest (the 7th) daughter of her parents. In 1890s in Ufa my maternal grandfather Joseph Gutman founded an iron workshop which was later turned into rather large iron foundry. The workshop produced even fire machines (!). It is interesting that in 1960s I travelled along the Volga River and in Volgograd I saw covers of manholes with inscription GUTMAN. My mother told me that my grandfather was very strict both at home and at work. He was also a man of great resource (in all spheres of life).

My maternal grandmother Vera Mikhailovna was born in Troitsk (Ural region). I remember my grandmother to be very good, easy-tempered and fair woman.



I was born in October 1918 in Ufa in the midst of the Civil War [1](#). The family of my maternal grandfather escaped from the Bolsheviks (I understood it later) in the wake of the retreating Kolchak army [2](#). They reached Vladivostok, and then moved to Harbin. Later they returned to Vladivostok, where my grandfather got ill and died soon. I guess it happened approximately in 1920. My grandmother lived in families of her children in turn, but the most part of her life she spent together with the family of her younger son David. I can tell nothing for a fact about the level of religiosity of my grandparents. I guess religion did not have a significant place in their life. My grandmother used to live with us for a long time, and I never saw her praying. She never attended the synagogue.

My grandmother and grandfather's elder son's name was Alexander. He was a man of rough temper and frequently quarreled with my grandfather (his father). Once he even left home, took a job of a sailor and went to South America. Nevertheless later he came back, healed the breach with parents, turned around and received good education in Switzerland. He worked as a chief mechanical engineer at the Chelyabinsk Tractor Factory. In 1937 during the Great Terror [3](#) he was arrested and perished in Stalin's camps. Of course we know no details about his death. I never saw him. Another brother of my mother (David - the younger brother) was educated in Germany. He worked in the sphere of road machine-building. He worked very successfully, but he also drank the cup of woe: in 1937 he was arrested and sent to camps in Vorkuta [a city in the far north of Russia]. But he was lucky: by that time his machines stopped working and nobody could understand the reason. They retrieved David (though by that time he was already half-dead) from Vorkuta. He managed to understand reasons of malfunctions and explained how to deal with them. They did not send him back to the camp, and it saved his life. He went on working as an engineer, and did it quite successfully. Anyway in 1934 (when I finished 7 classes) I visited him in Moscow, and it appeared that he had a personal car (presented to him by Ordzhonikidze). [Sergo Ordzhonikidze was an outstanding Soviet and Communist Party figure, a professional revolutionist (1886-1937).]

Camps undermined my uncle David's health, therefore he died during the war being not old at all. I remember David to be a witty and cheerful person. Here I'll tell you about an episode in 1934 in Moscow. When I visited my uncle David, my grandmother lived at his place. One morning we were having breakfast, when a driver entered. He was ready to bring my uncle to his office. 'Good morning, Ivan Pavlovich!' grandmother welcomed him. "I suppose you are cold, get warm!" And she filled a glass with vodka. Uncle said very politely (they were always very polite to each other) "Are you going to make a drunkard of my driver?" And grandmother answered "I know how to treat coachmen very well!"

My grandmother (I already told you) was very fair. Let me prove it. One of grandmother's daughters (Rebecca) got married and moved to Kharkov. She gave birth to a son Vitya, my cousin. It was my nightmare! I was an ordinary child: I ran, played tricks, and was often punished. And he was a model child. All my life parents held him up as an example for me. Mom used to say 'Vitya would never behave like this!' But you see, one day my grandmother suddenly asked me to tell her about the Himalayan islands. I was already about 10 years old; I liked geography and knew that there were no Himalayan islands on earth. But it was uncomfortable for me to point her mistake out and I managed to give our conversation another turn. And in the evening I heard my grandmother speaking to Mom "You are not right, your son is not bad at all. He did not want to hurt

my feelings, while Vitya explained to me in great detail that I understand nothing, that there are no Himalayan islands on earth.” After that case Vitya disappeared from my parents’ collection of educational methods. My grandmother died in 1942 at the age of 82. Later I met Vitya, he was a worthy person, a colonel of the Air Forces, had participated in the war. However, it was a pleasure for me to realize that though he was an ideal child, he achieved less than me.

My mom was born in Ufa in 1898. She finished grammar school in Ufa and went to Kiev to study at some courses for women. But by that time World War I already burst out, Germans came, and it became impossible for her to finish education. In 1916, my Mom met my father in Kiev, and that meeting was of critical importance for her. So, mom returned to Ufa, and father followed her and asked her parents for her hand. They got married. And when mom’s parents moved to the Far East, she did not go with them, but remained in Ufa with her young husband. I was born in 1918.

My paternal grandmother Basye Yakovlevna and grandfather Alexander Yosefovich were absolutely different. They lived in a small Belarus shtetl Kopys near Orsha (on the bank of the Dnieper River). Their family was very poor. Sholom-Aleikhem colorfully described life of such Jewish families in his works. [Sholom-Aleikhem was a Jewish writer (1859-1916).] They had 6 children, my father was the eldest. A small shop helped them to support their life. My grandmother was engaged in trading, and my grandfather used to pray. In contrast to Mom’s family they spoke only Yiddish. The family was very religious. They observed all Jewish traditions. I saw my paternal grandmother and grandfather only several times in my life: they came to visit us (in Ufa) to look how their elder son lived. Grandmother was very strict: she used to say she had come to organize everything in order. Mom considered her words skeptically, but kindly. She always listened to grandmother’s advices very respectfully. And my grandfather used to ask the same question “And where is the synagogue?” He usually took some striped bed sheets and leather belts and went to pray. I was surprised very much: at that time I knew nothing about tallit and tefillin.

Members of my parents’ family were respectful to religion, but (as I already told you) it did not occupy significant place in our life. During Pesach we ate matzot, but also ate Easter cakes and paskha with great pleasure [Paskha is traditional cake baked for Orthodox Easter]. When I was a child, my parents taught me to be respectful to clergymen. Later I read *The Tale of the Priest and of his Workman Balda* [Balda in Russian means a stupid or not very serious person] by Pushkin [4](#). [In that fairy tale the orthodox priest is shown to be greedy and silly.] I was surprised that Pushkin showed disrespect to a clergyman, an orthodox priest in this case. As far as rabbis are concerned, I did not see any during my childhood.

But let’s get back to my father’s childhood. When he was 13 years old, parents sent him away. He went to Vitebsk by a steamship. In Vitebsk his sister lived together with her husband. Her husband had small business connected with textiles. So my father started working there as an accountant. He was not educated, but very capable and purposeful. He managed to pass through exams and got a school leaving certificate without attending lectures. Later he entered a Kiev College for specialists in commerce. So he got acquainted with my Mom being a student.

Growing up

My father worked in an office. They were engaged in production and sales of pottery. Now I understand that we had not plenty to live. I think so because I remember my father cooking soap

for sale at home. I do not know what he made it from. I remember that it was white and blue, and father cut it into pieces using wire. But little by little our financial situation improved, there came a time of NEP [5](#). We were not rich, but not poor. On holidays our table was laden with rich food. We used to cook not less than 100 pelmeni [Russian dumplings] for one male member of the family. Family habits were more Russian, than Jewish. It could be seen in every moment of life, including meals. We lived on the 1st floor of a two-storey house. There was a yard covered with grass. I remember that we bought a horse because father had to go on business trips very often. The 2nd floor of the house was occupied by the family of doctor Chernyak. We were friends. Every Saturday adults played preference. So we led a steady provincial life.

In 1923 my sister Judith was born. I became an elder brother. Since I was 6, parents started to beat me if they considered me not to meet requirements of that role. But I was very much pleased to have a sister. My sister was my best friend when we were children. And later we became very close.

My sister finished school in Kiev, and entered Medical College in Ufa, in evacuation (she graduated from it in Moscow). My sister was a very capable person. She worked in Moscow; she was a well-known doctor, specialist in hematology. Unfortunately last year she died. I miss her very much. She had got a daughter Vera and a grandson.

In 1924 father moved to Kazan, where he became a director of the same office. A little bit later we joined him in Kazan. I remember that our steamship stopped at the place of junction of Kama to Volga rivers, and another steamship coming from the opposite direction moored to our steamship. From that steamship father came aboard our one: that was the way he met us. In Kazan we lived in the apartment on the 2nd floor of a house. There was a large yard full of trees. In the apartment there was a bathroom (it was very uncommon at that time). My Mom was a very sociable woman, she used to invite all old women from the neighboring houses to have a bath. After a bath, they used to twist their heads round with towels, drink tea and speak about peace time, i.e. about the time before the World War I. I listened to their stories with great interest. You know, human memory is very deceptive, no doubt. When I got to Kazan in 1980s and found our former house, I understood that it was small, and the yard was small, too. Probably it was me who grew up.

In 1927 father was advanced again and sent to Kiev. In Kiev he bought half of an apartment. Therefore in fact we lived in a communal apartment [6](#). Soon NEP was abandoned, father's office was closed, and (as I understand now) father realized that no good would come of commercial activities in the USSR. He found a job at glass-works. Soon he became a chief engineer at glass-works near Zhitomir (close to the border with Poland). Altogether he worked at 2 glass-works 6 or 7 years.

Father worked very well. His main task was to support technological process in glass-furnaces. He managed. We lived in Kiev and we visited him only in summer. Having worked there several years, father expected no lift in his career, because he had no special education. He went on semi-annual leave, and graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic College (Ceramic Faculty) without attending lectures. He studied days and nights. As soon as he got his diploma, he was appointed a chief engineer at large glass-works near Kharkov. There he worked for a year, and then was invited to be a chief engineer at the new factory producing thermos bottles (in Kiev). There he worked very successfully, too (his photo could be found on the board of honor). We were not rich (we could not

imagine richness), but we were not poor. I remember that one day my father, a chief engineer, received a bonus. He spent that sum of money having bought a big water-melon and a loaf of black bread. Mom rented out one room (I guess she had to). She knitted very well for all of us (my sister was always well-dressed).

In summer we used to leave for vacation. Sometimes we went to the Black Sea, sometimes rented small houses in the neighboring villages.

To my opinion my Mom had very reasonable educational principles. Our house was always open for my friends and for my sister's friends. Mom understood children very well. Here I can tell you that my friends often asked her advice instead of their parents'. At the same time mom was very impulsive by nature and a hard hitter. She was often on my back. But I deserved punishments, because I was a rather playful child. Here I'll tell you about an episode I remember very well. I was a schoolboy. I liked to study very much, it was interesting to me. But children at school were different. Their interests were different. Students were fond of gambling. I did not like it, but did not want to break with my comrades. We played at home of each participant in turn (when his parents were absent). So one day it was my turn. And I had no secrets from my mom.

I explained to her that it was my turn and my friends would come to play. Mom agreed. 10 boys came. We started gambling. Mom did not enter our room, but suddenly after a while there came a neighbor and asked our permission to play with us. He quickly gambled away his small sum of money and left. Then I understood that he was my mother's agent: she asked him to clear up the situation (what game we were playing, etc.). Mom did not want to come in herself because it would put me in an embarrassing situation in presence of my friends. A couple of days later Mom had a detailed talk to me about gambling. She even mentioned Dostoevsky [7](#). [Dostoevsky was a real gambler.] Mom forbade me nothing, but after that conversation I made my own decision and refused to gamble.

Mom worked much about the house, but we always had domestic servants. We had no governesses, but teachers regularly came to teach me and my sister foreign languages. I learned German letters before Russian ones. When I was a pupil of the 6th form, I started learning English and French. Later I had to stop studying French, it was too difficult. But when I read War and Peace by Tolstoy [8](#), I easily understood all text paragraphs written in French. I liked languages, they came easily to me. To tell the truth, later (when I started talking to Englishmen) I realized that I was able to communicate with books, not with people. I guess it was not my fault: they taught us that way. I became a schoolboy in Kiev. My first 7 years at school seemed to me a game: nothing was difficult for me. In the 7th grade, I realized that it was necessary to study seriously. Most of all I liked mathematics.

Boris Solomonovich Lembersky was a remarkable teacher at our school. He managed to teach every pupil individually when we were all together at lessons. After his training pupils were able to pass through entrance exams anywhere they liked. I also remember Pavel Ivanovich Novosiltsev, a teacher of history. His distinguishing feature was his true interest to children. By the way, at that time history course presented facts as if world did not exist before 1905 [9](#). Everything I know in history, I learned without any assistance (from books).

At school literature was the worst subject. Our teacher read us aloud, without drawing our attention to the beauty of our language. Sports occupied a significant place in my life: volleyball at first, then

swimming and tennis. Every day my training sessions lasted 3-4 hours. I studied very well, my school certificate was full of excellent grades, which allowed me to enter any college I liked without entrance examinations (I had to pass only through the entrance interview) [10](#). I had a lot of friends; I am still in touch with some of them. Our last meeting was devoted to the 65th anniversary of our school leaving. Among my friends there were both Jews and gentiles. By the way, in our class more than 50% of pupils were Jewish. But the nationality of my friends was of no importance for me.

Here I'd like to tell you that I finished school in 1937, in the midst of Stalin mass repressions. You see, I know about it not by hearsay. We lived in the five-storey house, and doors of our arrested neighbors were sealed up one by one. I remember that I woke up one night and saw my parents standing at the window and looking out. Only now I understand that they watched cars passing by and guessed whether one of them was meant for them. Members of our family agreed that arrested people were guilty in nothing. But it happened somehow (and I give Mom the credit of it) that we (children) understood everything very well: it was one thing to talk to family members and another to talk in public. Parents did not hesitate speaking about political events in our presence. My Mom was so impulsive that it was difficult for her to keep secret. I remember that after Khrushchev denounced Stalin's methods [11](#) and rehabilitated many prisoners (unfortunately most of them posthumously) Mom told a joke 'Khrushchev is walking around a cemetery, bowing low to each tomb and asking ARE YOU REHABILITATED?' So, we were taught to hold our tongues, but at the same time parents used to say that we should stand up for justice. I learned that lesson very well, and later I'll tell you how I suffered over it. By the way, I do not believe people who say that they learned about Stalin repressions only after Khrushchev's speech. Everyone knew, but was afraid: it was too terrible to know.

So, it was necessary to choose a college. At that time I knew nothing about pure science, because I was brought up in the family of engineers. If I knew, I would have entered Mathematical Faculty of the University and would have been engaged in my favorite mathematics. But at that time I decided between the 2 variants: a school teacher or an engineer. I chose engineering career and entered the Kiev Polytechnic College. My parents did not interfere. Again my father left Kiev for Gorky [now Nizhniy Novgorod] region to work at a factory producing windshields. I guess departure of my father had one more reason: he had a foreboding about a possible arrest. In that case simple change of residence could help.

So, I became a student. It was a rather thoughtless action. I was advised to study at the Faculty of Chemical Mechanical Engineering. I have studied there a year. That year did not impress me at all. I was an excellent student in mathematics, because I was prepared very well. But I did not like the way they taught us physics. And technical drawing was the most difficult subject for me. It was a real torture. I remember that one day a teacher made 93 remarks about my drawing. Besides our studies we had to participate in different meetings, where we were obliged to blame enemies of people [12](#) (it had to be a group action). Most often we had to blame participants of different antigovernment groups, who had already been arrested and condemned. Those people lived in Moscow, and we were in Kiev, but it made no difference. It was not an easy way for the College communist leaders to deal with students: they asked improper questions, refused to vote for condemning resolutions. I cannot tell that I acted up to my principles: I was a conformist (sat still, solving integrals and raising my hand when demanded). Probably, that was the way I survived. But it was impossible to survive another way.

Well, a year passed. It was before the war, different military schools invited cadets. It was not absolutely voluntary: all Komsomol [13](#) members were obliged to receive medical certificates. I did not mind to become a cadet: it seemed to me that in case of war it was necessary to defend our country. Moreover, I did not hold my College dear. At the 1st medical examination a doctor asked me whether I wanted to study at that military school. I did not (and I told her about it honestly). She found a nonexistent defect. Later I went through the medical examination selecting volunteers for the Navy. By that time I decided to be engaged in shipbuilding and told the doctor about it. I passed for general service and was sent to study at the Military School named after Frunze in Leningrad. It happened in 1938.

Since then all my life is connected with fleet. I was taken in as a cadet of the 2nd course. Training was absolutely different. They taught us not physics and mathematics, but navigation and astronomy, etc. Among our teachers there were many officers of the Tsarist Fleet. Every Saturday and Sunday they gave a ball. Each cadet received two permits: for himself and for his girlfriend. Our balls were well-known all over the city, and our graduates were considered to be suitable matches. I did not like those parties; I preferred to go to the swimming pool. I took part in it only once and was surprised to be a success. Later I understood the reason. At that time portraits of Stalin scholars were placed on a special honorable board [the best students of high schools received Stalin stipends] and my photo was among them.

In winter we studied and in summer we sailed. Our 1st summer we spent on board the Aurora Cruiser. [The Cruiser Aurora was launched in 1900. It took part in the October revolution of 1917. Now it is a museum.]

Next year we sailed on board fighting ships, and got to Liepaya (it was a foreign port at that time, but our military bases were already situated there). So I participated in the early stages of occupation of the Baltic countries [14](#). Our last training sail took place on the Ladoga Lake. We got to the well-known Valaam Island. Monks had already run away and the monastery was handed over to the Fleet. School of Sea Cadets was to be placed there. I was surprised to see the huge and tuned monastery farming. I got into the special library team. We had to check the monastic library and do away with the literature of White Guards [15](#). There I found not only religious, but also secular books. There I read a lot of books by different authors I never came across before.

During the war

Here I'll tell you about the prewar days. Stalin tried to gain time. I know that our naval attaché in Berlin got to know for sure that Germans were going to attack the USSR on June 22. He informed Kuznetsov (Naval Minister) about it, and Kuznetsov reported to Stalin. Stalin said "Don't give way to provocations." I guess Stalin could not believe that someone was more artful than him, and swept aside all hints about beginning of the war. On June 14 PRAVDA newspaper published denial by the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union: "...the Germans meet all their engagements, therefore we have to stop panic mood.' And we were lucky in a certain sense. Naval minister N.G. Kuznetsov was very capable, resolute, a man of insight (in contrast to many army generals, for example Voroshylov and even Zhukov [[16](#), [17](#)]). At our School they told us that newspapers could write what they wanted, but we had to keep our powder dry. The point was that Kuznetsov visited Spain in 1937 [18](#) and saw Spanish battleship shipwrecked by German airplanes. He was impressed. Therefore he introduced into practice the following rule: only one word had to be broadcast in case

of danger and that word meant combat readiness. When the war burst out, he managed to transmit that word by radio, while generals of other armies wrote long encryptions which had to be decoded. That was why during the 1st days of the war no warships were destroyed, while almost all our aircrafts were crushed.

The war burst out when I was in Leningrad passing examinations. We were divided into 2 groups: submariners and sailors. I became a submariner. We were sent to Vladivostok to finish our education. That was why I spent the first 2 months of war in the Far East. Later they divided us into 4 groups and sent to different seas. I was sent to the North. We were moving very slowly (in heated goods vans). [A heated goods van was a freight car adapted for transportation of people.] We were passing through Moscow in the beginning of November, the city was almost empty. It was a sad sight. One car was destroyed by bombing and one of our cadets was seriously wounded: he lost his legs. Before that case I was not serious thinking about the war, but then I suddenly understood how dangerous it was. We reached Arkhangelsk, and then went to Murmansk by the ship across the sea coated with ice. There I went to the staff department. They asked me where I wanted to serve. I preferred surface ship and they appointed me a junior navigator to Gremyaschiy torpedo boat.

Here I'll tell you about my parents. Mom together with my sister hardly managed to leave Kiev and reached Ufa having been bombed several times. Father was mobilized in the beginning of the war (by that time he was 49 years old). People of his age have been quickly let off from the army. He went to Ufa, too. But at that time I knew nothing about them.

My service was to accompany escorts. Englishmen and Americans sent to the USSR lend-lease aid: tanks, airplanes, tinned stewed meat. Lend-lease aid was given on credit. [Lend-lease was a system of loaning or renting arms, ammunition, strategic raw material, foodstuffs, goods and services to countries - allies.] They sent their aid through northern way (where I served), Pacific Ocean (from the Western coast of the USA to Vladivostok), and by trains from Iran. The 3rd way was the safest, but the longest (it took many months). The northern way was the shortest one, but it was the most dangerous.

I'd like to tell you about my attitude to the lend-lease program. During the Cold War aid of allies was belittled. They used to say that it made only 4% of the total number of armament. It is true, but what 4% and during what time. In the beginning of the war our army suffered heavy losses. Without tanks, airplanes, and automobiles received according to that program, we would have not survived. That program played an important role in our war! And now it is recognized.

This cargo had to be transferred past Norway (occupied by Germans). The ships had to move along a narrow corridor: occupied Norway staffed with German airplanes on the one side and Arctic ice bar on the other one. The way was a week long, and German airplanes needed only half an hour to reach us from the Norwegian shore and drop their bombs upon us. Foreigners called that way to Murmansk real hell. It came about the following way: 20-30 trading vessels with cargo moved towards Murmansk. They were surrounded by warships forming a circle. Sometimes (if the number of warships was enough) they formed 2 circles. Patrol ships took the lead destroying German submarines. English warships moved from the West guarding cargo ships against German warships. Two groups of trading vessels started from Murmansk and from England simultaneously. We had to escort our ships and meet English ones.

In the certain point (at the 20th meridian) Soviet warships joined the accompanying ships. All these ships were called a convoy. The convoy was slow-footed. Many ships had been taken down by German airplanes. The water was icy. If a person fell down into water, he had no chance to survive. Besides the ship guns became iced and it was necessary to chop off the ice. Germans learned about a convoy long before it approached Norway and started preparing submarines and heavy bombers. Germans not only bombed us from airplanes, but also torpedoed. Very soon we learned how to shoot into the water from our biggest guns. It was necessary to shoot so that a wall of water rose in front of a dive-bomber, and it crashed into it. That was the way I served.

I participated in 23 convoys. Englishmen, who took part in 2 convoys and survived, thought they were lucky. Our ship was lucky to catch the bomb lying in dock. It made a hole, but did not reach the engine-room, and that was the most important. But you see, about 15 persons were lost that day.

Here I'd like to get back a little. When I was a cadet, I got married. My first wife Galina was German. As soon as the communist leader of our crew got to know about it, I understood that there was no escaping fate. One day in our wardroom we were talking about prisoners of war. I expressed my opinion that not every prisoner of war was a traitor. The communist leader perverted my words and said that I called upon to give up. A week later I was read out of the Party and transferred from my ship. By that moment I had already taken part in 9 convoys. I was appointed a commander of the girls' platoon (at that time they drafted girls). After my serious service, it was a hard blow to me, but it did not knock me down. I wrote a letter to the flagman navigator with a request to send me to some ship. A month later I was lucky to receive an assignment of navigator. Later I understood why it happened: shortly before the war the flagman navigator himself was arrested, therefore he understood well that accusations could be false.

I got to an absolutely different ship: a mobilized sweep vessel. It had 2 small guns and carried out patrol service at the entrance of Kola bay. That ship was an easy target. Flying back after an unfortunate bombardment of Murmansk, German airplanes always had an opportunity to bomb our vessel. A lot of such trawlers went down, but we were lucky. One day we received a radiogram: to the north they found a boat going full stream and carrying 50 people, more dead than alive (they were from a bombed-out convoy). We found them, lifted aboard, warmed up, and brought to the hospital. Fifty years later Englishmen, participants of northern convoys, visited Leningrad. I spoke at that meeting and told that story. A month later I received a letter from England from one of those rescued guys. We are in touch now.

At that ship I was the only professional soldier. I served there 8 months. I am not going to bore you with technical details, I'll tell you only that I noticed certain disorders in navigation system and informed the flagman navigator. They set eyes on me and sent me from the trawler to a fighting ship. Later I started serving on board the Razumny torpedo boat and served there till the end of the war. I finished war as a captain of the torpedo boat.

During the war, I never came across manifestations of anti-Semitism. By the way at our School there were 7-8 Jews for 1,000 cadets. Among crew members there were few Jews, too. My comrades, who were not naval, told me that there were manifestations of anti-Semitism. But of course state anti-Semitism took place: both I and people around me came across it.

So the war was finished. I was awarded 4 orders: Orders of the Great Patriotic War both 1st and 2nd Class [19](#) and 2 Orders of the Red Star [20](#). I have got more than 20 medals. After the end of the war I served 2 more years at the same torpedo boat: we trained sailors and arranged group firing.

Due to some reasons my first marriage was broken. In 1947 I married Lubov Mironovna Vovsi. Lubov Mironovna was born in Moscow in 1925. She graduated from the Physics Faculty of the Moscow University and worked in Leningrad at the Television Institute.

After the war

After the capture of Berlin I was granted leave of absence. By that time my parents and my sister had moved to Moscow, and father got a job at glassworks near Moscow. That factory was very close to Moscow. On May 9, 1945 we went to Manezhnaya square joining the crowd of triumphant Muscovites. My sister invited her friend Lubov. My sister was very cheerful and she invented the following entertainment for me: she bought 13 theater tickets admitting self and friend each and invited one of her friends for each performance. Lubov Mironovna was one of those girls and it was our 2nd meeting. At first I was only polite and entertained the girls with cakes. It was rather difficult for me, because I did not know the names of those cakes. One of my dates asked me about an éclair, and I had no idea what it looked like.

In 1947 I entered the Naval Academy named after Voroshilov in Leningrad. It was not an easy task, because there was a large entry, but I managed. I was a very good cadet. Among other subjects they taught us bases of Marxism and Leninism (of course!). And I made the most terrible boner: discussing the works of communist scholars (Lenin [21](#), in particular) I called one of his books (I do not know why!) notorious. I meant nothing, but it appeared to be enough to expel me from the Party. Thanks to efforts of my wife's father professor Miron Semenovich Vovsi [Miron Semenovich (Meir Solomonovich) Vovsi (1897-1960) was a Soviet therapist, Major-General of medical service. During the war he was the chief therapist of the army. Vovsi was arrested during the Doctors' Plot [22](#), but discharged after the case was closed.], the punishment was changed into an easier one: I was transferred from a Party member to a candidate Party member. It meant that they permitted me to finish my studies. I graduated from the Academy with excellent grades (all fives), but they gave me a four for the diploma. You see if I got a five for the diploma, they would have been obliged to inscribe my name on the marble board in the Academy lobby, but it was impossible for a person just expelled from the communist party. I was appointed a teacher at the Engineering Academy. It was not good for a career of a naval officer. I worked there a year, and wrote my first book. But there came 1952.

In 1952 parents of my wife were arrested in connection with Doctors' Plot. As for me, I was expelled from the Party once more, fired and transferred to the reserve. At that time my wife worked at the Leningrad Television Institute. She was fired, too. By that time we had got 2 children: my son born in my first wedlock (in 1941) and our mutual son (born in 1949). We sent our children to my parents and were waiting for arrest every minute. I started searching for work (we were out of money and sold books, things). At first I was naïve enough to try to find work connected with my profession. I was well educated, people everywhere wanted to give me a job, but only until I named my wife. I was turned down at all special educational institutions, then at all schools. Later I simplified the problem: I wanted to work as (for example) a steersman on a small boat. And they said 'How can we trust you to steer the boat if your father-in-law is the main murderer!' They also

did not permit me to study at trolleybus courses. I was offered to work as a tugboat captain, but only upon condition of my divorce. It was not good for me. I happened to meet my friend, a captain of torpedo boat. He had also been transferred to the reserve, but his reason was much more honorable: hard drinking. When we met, he held a post of the captain at the Leningrad fishing fleet. He promised to help me and took me to their director, whom I told everything openly. The director gave me the job of time-table clerk, but promised to fire me immediately in case somebody got to know about details of my biography. I also tried to find job for Lubov: I brought her texts for translation and she did it. But she never signed her translations.

At last Stalin died. In prison father of my wife was told that they would discharge him in a few days. They asked him whether he had a wish. He said he wanted to know about the destiny of his relatives. He got the following answer: 'Don't worry about your wife: she is WITH US, and we will find out about your daughter.' We got to know about it much later. And when Stalin died, my wife cried: she was sure that execution of her father would take place very soon. My director told me 'Do you remember that we have to fulfill our condition? Yesterday I was asked about you by NKVD [23](#) representatives. Please bring your resignation.' I did it, but unexpectedly our trade union did not agree with my discharge. By the way, when they expelled me from the Party I appealed to the Party superiors against their decision and later forgot about it. After Stalin's death, they invited me to Moscow and informed that my appeal had been considered and my position in the Party was redeemed. Next day I was appointed a deputy chief of staff, squadron in Tallinn. The post was the most enviable, but at that time I warmed to my work at the Academy and wanted to return there. But the Academy chief said 'So many people danced on your bones, it will be difficult for you to work together. Come back a year later.'

So I left for Tallinn. I served there 3 years. My family remained in Leningrad; therefore I lived in my cabin on board the ship. I served easily: in fact I had recently graduated from the Academy and wrote 2 books while working at the Krylov Academy. My scientific background was impressive. Those books were very useful to me during my service in Tallinn. Besides I was surrounded by people I got acquainted with during the war. The chief of the staff was my comrade (we studied at the same Academy). Rather quickly I gained authority and it became clear that I was the right man in the right place. You remember that I arrived to Tallinn being an associate party member. In a year I had to be promoted from associate to full membership. A year passed, but the chief of our political department said it was necessary to wait a year more. I quickly understood what the point was. At that time Beriya [24](#) was arrested. My wife's father Miron Vovsi remembered that it was Beriya himself who congratulated him on the occasion of his discharge and called him a free person after Stalin's death. And I was unwary enough to tell someone about it. Therefore Beriya's arrest cast an imputation on my character. That was the tragicomedy of my personal contact with Beriya. I was promoted from associate to full Party membership half-year later.

In 1956 I was suggested promotion in Kamchatka. But I decided to return to Leningrad and be engaged in scientific and pedagogical activities. I got good characteristics and returned to Krylov Academy to work at a scientific group. There I wrote a book about new vintages of ships and defended my kandidat nauk dissertation basing on it. [The kandidat nauk is a scientific degree in the USSR and in Russia; it is given to college graduates, who managed to pass through special examinations and defended their dissertation in public.] During presentation of my thesis everything was going fine, but suddenly the chief of our political department (those bodies always

liked me very much!) asked me what I had been expelled from the Party for. I explained everything. He said it was clear to him and sat down. But unfortunately his question was a signal to start persecution. It manipulated the voting and the vote was negative. The Academy chief made a helpless gesture and said 'I do not understand the members of our academic scientific council.' In the meantime my book was published. It turned out comic: the dissertation was blocked, but the book was published. Moreover at that time many ships were constructed directly according to my book. The Academy chief invited me and said 'It is time to finish, get ready for the second time.' And I defended my thesis without a dissentient voice. All those events took a year. I do not regret: I worked very well.

Illness of my father-in-law professor Vovsi was another tragedy for our family. He was diagnosed with cancer. He was one of the best doctors of his time, and he himself predicted he would die not later than in 8 months. Naturally he wanted his daughter to be beside him. He asked my consent to be moved to Moscow. I could not refuse though my service was a dream of service. So I started working at the Navy Staff in Moscow. Together with my wife and 2 children (our younger son Mikhail was born in 1956) we made our abode with my parents-in-law. My elder son Alexander remained in Leningrad (by that time he was a student of the 3rd course, Polytechnic College). In the Navy Staff I served at the operations department (the most secret one), and I was the only Jew there. Perhaps that was the reason why they moved me to another department: Navy Scientific Committee. They did it nicely, and reasoned that it was necessary to satisfy the requirements of my own scientific interests.

In 1960 my father-in-law died. His death was a great loss not only for his relatives, but also for medicine. His patients carried his coffin to the grave in their arms. I am sure that his arrest hastened his death. About a year later I was suddenly deprived of the access permit. They gave me no explanations, but I was sure that the point was in the state anti-Semitism (at that time it flourished everywhere). I felt annoyed with all that, called KGB [25](#) (Navy representative) and asked for an audience. I met there a polite naval officer. I showed him the list of my scientific articles and he said 'You are a research worker, why do you work at the Navy Staff?' I explained that it was not my idea: I had to work there because of my father-in-law's illness. The officer agreed that it altered the case. Finally I managed to return to the Krylov Academy. There were also some difficulties with accommodation, but the problem was settled. My mother-in-law refused to move with us and remained in Moscow. We returned to Leningrad together with my wife and 2 children.

There I needed an access permit (I lost it in Moscow) and received it rather quickly. I understood that that person from KGB helped me. I worked in the Academy from 1962 till 1973. I worked successfully, wrote several books more and got a doctor's degree. In 1973 I was 55 years old: it was time to retire. I got demobilized, but did not want to sit at home. I started searching for work. I made a name for myself both in scientific and educational spheres of life. I decided to become a teacher at a college. But it was not so easy: not everyone wanted to have a competitor at their faculty. As a result I found a job at the Institute of Methods and Management Technique (it was organized for improvement of professional skill in the field of new computer technique): my last 5 years at the Academy were connected with computer equipment. I worked with pleasure, taught, and was engaged in scientific work. Five years later I became a head of the department of Automated Control Systems. I worked there 23 years (till 2001). The atmosphere there was very friendly. I managed to write 2 books more and a great number of articles. I also often went on

business trips, participated in various conferences. But Perestroika came. It was followed by collapse of the USSR. Many institutes decayed, but our institute managed to survive, though it changed much.

My children's life

Now I'll tell you about our children. All my sons grew up as lovers of mathematics. My elder son Alexander was born in 1941. He was a very gifted boy. He finished his school with a gold medal, studied at the Polytechnic College and was going to be transferred to the University. But at the age of 22 he drowned in Siberia during a camping trip. My younger sons graduated from the mathematics faculty of the University. At present they are experts in the theory of probability. Boris (born in 1949) finished a school specialized in mathematics with a gold medal. It was impossible for a person with our surname to enter the University, but we decided to try. At the first examination (mathematics) he got not a good mark (three). We knew that it was absolutely impossible to enter the University having three among examination marks. Mark Bashmakov, the former teacher at Boris' school helped us very much (by that moment he worked at the University). He advised that Boris should pass through other examinations, and later address commission of appeal (the commission had to check fairness of evaluation of student's knowledge).

It was a very wise advice: Boris got fives for all other subjects (these marks were given fairly, because all the teachers knew that it was impossible to become a student having three). Then my son addressed the commission of appeal and his examination-paper was adjudged to be worth a five. Boris graduated from the University and tried to become a postgraduate student, but got three for Marxism-Leninism and did not manage to enter. To have a Jew as a postgraduate student was too much for the University! At that time Mark Bashmakov worked at the Leningrad Electrotechnical College. He invited Boris to work with him. Boris agreed with gratitude. By the way Mark played a large part in my life. I'll tell you about it later. Boris has been working at the Leningrad Electrotechnical College as a senior lecturer till now. He has two daughters.

My younger son Mikhail was born in 1956. At present he is a professor of the University, he is a mathematician too, and he devoted himself to the theory of probability. He also graduated from the mathematical faculty of the University. He has three children.

Recent years

One day in 1991 or in 1992 Mark Bashmakov (I already told you about him) called me and said that in Italy he got acquainted with a Russian emigrant Vladimir Ladyzhensky. Ladyzhensky wanted to arrange assistance to Russia. Mark considered me able to participate in the project on the part of Russia. Vladimir arrived to our Institute, examined everything, appreciated our new equipment and told that we fully answered his requirements. His purpose was to create small centers for raising the level of professional skill. He wanted to create one of such centers on the basis of our Institute and make me its director. He managed. I gathered good and strong team. Our project was approved in all higher echelons. During the first year project participants went abroad on long business trips.

The first city we visited was Rome. Certainly I was shocked by the beauty of Rome, but regarding our business Italians could teach us nothing (I understood it immediately). Our level was very good

and it was a pleasure. You see, the Iron Curtain [26](#) rose recently and we had no opportunity to compare the levels. Our next trip was to London. There we visited World ORT computer laboratory. [World ORT is a non-governmental organization whose mission is the advancement of Jewish people through training and education, with past and present activities in over 100 countries.] It was very interesting and useful, and we learned much there.

Our project was a success, and I enjoyed popularity. I was invited to participate in another joint international project. Later I organized them myself. Well, I have been wandering around Europe about 9 years. At the same time I did not stop my work as a teacher and faculty head. At present I go on arranging similar projects, but now I do it on the basis of the Polytechnic College.

In 2001 I left the post of department chair at the Institute of Methods and Management Technique, but continued working there as a consulting professor. On the basis of the Institute I created a system of distance education.

In our family we never discussed the question of departure to Israel (neither we, nor our children).

Before 1937 it was possible to speak about merits and demerits of the Soviet regime. But after 1937 all merits were made null and void by demerits. I estimated all political events sensibly. I was on the side of Hungarians during the Hungarian revolution [27](#) and on the side of Czechs during the Prague spring [28](#). But I was a conformist, I did not protest on the Red Square. [On August 28, 1968 eight Soviet dissidents came to the Red Square to protest against the USSR armies in Prague.] I think that Gorbachev [29](#) was a great politician: he disorganized the communist system. It seems to me that he did much more for the country, than Yeltsin. [Yeltsin Boris (1931-2007) was the first President of the Russian Federation. He was elected on June 12, 1991.] He was alone fighting against the Soviet authorities.

I do not participate in the Jewish life of Petersburg. Lubov Mironovna sometimes receives food packages there.

Glossary:

[1](#) Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

[2](#) Kolchak, Aleksandr Vasilyevich (1874-1920)

Russian admiral and White Commander in Western Siberia during the Civil War (1918-22). He was the commander of the Black Sea Fleet during WWI, after the October Revolution (1917) he was one of the organizers of the White Guards and became Minister of War in an anti-Bolshevik government, set up in Omsk, Siberia. In November 1918 he carried out a coup and assumed dictatorship. He was successful at fighting the Bolsheviks in Siberia and was recognized by both, the Provisional Government in Russia as well as the Allies. In early 1919 he managed to capture the Ural and had an army of 400,000 people. After a retreat to Irkutsk he was betrayed to the Bolsheviks who executed him and took possession of Siberia.

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 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

5 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

6 Communal apartment

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

7 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

8 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including War and Peace, Anna Karenina and The Death of Ivan Ilyich, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as Sevastopol Sketches, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

9 1905 Russian Revolution

Erupted during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, and was sparked off by a massacre of St. Petersburg workers taking their petitions to the Tsar (Bloody Sunday). The massacre provoked disgust and protest strikes throughout the country: between January and March 1905 over 800,000 people participated in them. Following Russia's defeat in its war with Japan, armed insurrections broke out in the army and the navy (the most publicized in June 1905 aboard the battleship Potemkin). In 1906 a wave of pogroms swept through Russia, directed against Jews and Armenians. The main unrest in 1906 (involving over a million people in the cities, some 2,600 villages and virtually the entire Baltic fleet and some of the land army) was incited by the dissolution of the First State Duma in July. The dissolution of the Second State Duma in June 1907 is considered the definitive end to the revolution.

10 Entrance interview

graduates of secondary schools awarded silver or gold medals (cf: graduates with honors in the U.S.) were released from standard oral or written entrance exams to the university and could be admitted on the basis of a semi-formal interview with the admission committee. This system exists in state universities in Russia and most of the successor states up to this day.

11 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.

12 Enemy of the people

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

13 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.

14 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.

15 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.

16 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

17 Zhukov, Georgy (1896-1974)

Soviet Commander, Marshal of the Soviet Union, Hero of the Soviet Union. Georgy Zhukov was the most important Soviet military commander during World War II.

18 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

19 Order of the Great Patriotic War

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

20 Order of the Red Star

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

21 Lenin (1870-1924)

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

22 Doctors' Plot

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

23 NKVD

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

24 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

25 KGB: The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

26 1956: It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

27 Iron Curtain

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

28 Prague Spring

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

29 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies,

founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.