

# Rahil Shabad

*Rahil Shabad is a petite fragile lady with a small face and bright brown eyes. She looks like the Biblical character Rahil, who was the favorite wife of the forefather Jacob. She was known for her modesty and kindness. Rahil Shabad is both kind and modest. She has a quite and distinctive voice. She is very brisk and agile for her age of 85. Even some young people wished they were like that. There were all kinds of things in her fate. She had to overcome a lot of sorrow. It was hard for her to stand it. She looks calm, but she does not smile a lot. Rahil lost her only daughter, who was an intelligent and beautiful woman. Then she lost her husband, who could not get over his daughter's death. At the very beginning she said: "I must have been made from iron". Rahil lives by herself in a 2-room apartment of the standard house built in the 1960s in the northern part of Moscow. Her apartment is cozy and clean. There are a lot of doilies, cushions and rugs made by her. There are pictures of her relatives on the walls as well as the souvenirs brought from the trips abroad.*

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## **My family background**

My father's family lived in Lithuania in the village of Olkeniki [Editor's note: This village does not exist today. It might have merged with a bigger town or may have disappeared for some other reason.]. There was a Jewish Pale of Settlement [1](#) in Russia – Jews were not permitted to settle in big cities. It was not happening in Lithuania. Even in the biggest Lithuanian city, the capital Vilnius, half of the population accounted for Jews. Thus, the Jews in Lithuania could live in big cities and in villages. Piety was encouraged by the local authorities. The overwhelming majority of the Lithuanian Jews was religious and kept Jewish traditions no matter where they lived - in the city or in a hamlet. The children were also raised in religious Jewish traditions for them to become true Jews.

I do not know where and when my parental grandfather Gesel-Tsodik Karpas was born. He was a forester. Neither do I know when my paternal grandmother Rive-Malke was born. I do not know her maiden name either. Grandmother was a tall slender brunette with a beautiful face. They say my face looks like hers. Grandfather worked, and grandmother was a housewife, which was customary for those times. There were five children in the family. There were two elder daughters Hana-Feiga and Neha, born in 1885 and 1886 respectively. Then sons were born. Avrom-Itshok was born in 1887, Leib in 1889 and my father Haim-Dovid, the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1893. In accordance with the Jewish traditions children were given hyphenated names. They believed if kids were severely ill, death could be tricked - for instance it would come after Haim, but meet Dovid

and leave empty handed.

I do not know the details of my father's childhood. Grandfather died in 1895, when father was 2. Grandmother remained a widow with 5 children. I have no idea how could they have survived without a bread-winner. Father told us that the family was getting assistance from some relatives, but still it was not enough to get by. The eldest son and daughter Faina-Feiga immigrated to the USA at the end of the 19th century. They got married there and lived in Boston and in the towns in the closest vicinity of Boston. Avrom-Itshok did well. He sold ready-made clothes. I do not know why he remained a bachelor. In his lifetime he had been helping his kin, including my father as well. Part of the Avrom-Itshok's capital was demised to the relatives under condition that they would spend the money on education of children and grandchildren. Unfortunately we corresponded with the relatives in the USA after revolution as of 1917 [Russian Revolution of 1917] [2](#). Then it was terminated as it was very dangerous [keep in touch with relatives abroad] [3](#). We did not keep in touch and I knew hardly anything about my American relatives. I only know that uncle Avrom-Itshok died in the 1940s and aunt Hana-Feiga passed away in 1936.

Only in the 1990s I unexpectedly found out about my American kin. I was on the Jewish Vostriakovskoye Cemetery in Moscow where my relatives were buried, including my husband's brother Isidor Shabad, who perished during WW2. I saw a crowd of people by the graves of my relatives. It turned out that one of them, Olga, came from the USA, where she immigrated with the kin in the 1970s. She was the first cousin once removed. She broached a conversation and asked whether she could help me in any way. I asked her to search my father's relatives, who left for the USA. I said I would be happy to find out something about them. There was a miracle. Olga fulfilled my request. She found my aunt cousin Rita Carpas, the only relative of mine, who is still in the USA. Rita and I exchanged letters and photographs. I came to her to the USA for a visit. It was hard for us to communicate as Rita did not speak Russian and I did not speak English, but there were voluntary interpreters who helped us out. Besides, we used to communicate non-verbally.

Grandmother Rive-Malke never got married again. When the elder children left, she stayed with a younger daughter Neha and a small son, my father. The living was hard and my father's childhood was over very early. He had to help the family. Grandmother apprenticed my father to the wood-carver since early teens. Father had been an apprentice for 4 years, which was a hard and painstaking. It caused the myopia because eyes were strained. When father understood that he would not be able to use his potential, he went to the Russian city Saratov [800 km to the east from Moscow] and entered construction school. He did well at school and decided to go on with his education upon finishing school. He went to Saint-Petersburg to take entrance exams at the Institute of Civil Engineering. Back in that time there was a 5-per cent admission quota for the Jews [percent of Jews admitted to higher educational institutions] [4](#). Father passed several exams and flunked one. I do not know whether my father was not admitted because of his nationality or the lack of knowledge. Father went to the town Valuiki [about 630 km to the south from Moscow] and found a job as a construction/technician. Father liked to tell about his life in Valuiki. Both the workers and the management treated him very well and appreciated as a good specialist. Father learnt a lot in construction. He was supposed to tackle technical tasks independently and it was very useful for him. He did not feel anti-Semitism. Judging from his own experience father said that anti-Semitism was displayed in big cities and provincial people were much more tolerant.

In 1911 my father was drafted in the tsarist army. Father went through a physical in Vilnius and he was recognized unfit for the army service as he had poor eye-sight. When the military clerk was issuing a document for my father, he said that father's name did not sound Lithuanian and put him Karpis. So the last name Karpis remained and father's children and grandchildren got that name as well. Father did not change his name officially but Haim-Dovid Karpis is written in all his documents. In Valuiki father was called Russian name Efim [common name] [5](#), which was euphonious with his original name Haim.

Father's sister Neha was married to a local Jew called Polyachek in Olkeniki. After the Revolution of 1917 they immigrated to Palestine. Some of our distant relatives said that some relatives of Polyachek family lived in Israel. There is nothing I know about them.

My mother's family lived in a Latvian town Kraziai [about 200 km from Vilnius]. Their house was on the stately bank of the Western Dvina, abundant in pine trees. My maternal grandfather Leizer-Aba Tsentsiper was involved in wood processing, timber rafting and timber trade. There was a ferry by their house. It was the only way for the local inhabitants to cross the river. Grandfather derived a lot of profit from the ferry. There was a family legend about his extraordinary visual memory and his mathematic capabilities. He was shown coins of different denomination for just couple of seconds and after that he unmistakably could name their total amount as well as subtotals of the coins of different denomination. I do not know anything about my maternal grandmother, not even her name. I know for sure that she was a housewife. There were four children in the family: the elder sons Abo-Simon and Ehiel and daughters Esfir and my mother Eida-Sheina, the youngest. I only know when my mother was born, it was in 1890. My mother's Russian name was Sofia. Grandmother died young, when mother was a baby and mother's elder sister Esfir died shortly afterwards. Their deaths might have been caused by some sort of epidemic. Grandfather did not want to get married again, though he was not old. Grandmother's kin lived in Kraziai, viz. Her sister Beila and her husband, whose name was Gaimer. The spouses helped grandfather raise 3 orphaned children. The family was rather well-off. Grandfather made a lot of money. His house was open to friends. He generously helped them. I think the family was religious, which was traditional for those times. Grandfather clearly and fairly understood that apart from Jewish education children were supposed to get the secular one. The three of them finished lyceums. I do not know whether they went to Jewish lyceums. I know that mother was fluent in Yiddish, German and Russian. When the sons finished studies they started helping grandfather with the forestry.

I do not know how my parents met. All I know is that it happened in 1910. They got married on the 8th of February of 1912. My maternal grandfather made a traditional Jewish wedding in Kraziai. First they lived in grandfather's house and shortly after the wedding father was offered a job at the pipe mill in Poltava to work as a technician/builder. Parents moved to Poltava and in half year they moved to Ekaterinoslav [now Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, 450 km from Kiev], where father also worked in construction. There in 1913 the first child was born, Evsey. Daughter Esfir, named after early deceased sister of my mother, was born in 1915.

My parents were rather well-heeled. Before revolution father got 110 golden rubles per month. It was a lot of money. Father said that he preferred banknotes as the coins of soft gold were given in certain number, but they were exchanged by weight. Besides coins could be easily lost if there was a hole in the pocket. According to my parents' tales the life before the Revolution was not that bad. Father was operated on in spring 1917. He was in a separate ward and the nurse was at beck and

call. She could be called by ringing a bell, placed above the head. Mother and children went to the hospital to see the father. Soon father recouped and was discharged from the hospital. Things seemed to have settled down, if not by a coming change – the Revolution as of 1917.

Father lost his job. It was the period of unrest, when construction workers were not needed. There was a total devastation. Then Civil War [6](#) was unleashed. Father ought to earn money for the family so he decided to make soap. He boiled soap and cast them in bars. Mother and father sold the bars of soap on the market. Of course they did not yield that much profit, but it was enough to get by.

In 1918 Jewish pogroms [Pogroms in Ukraine] [7](#) commenced in Ekaterinoslav. Our family did not suffer, but there were victims among Jews. My elder brother Evsey told me about the carts passing by our house. There were white coffins with the Jews – the victims of pogroms. The house, where our family used to live, was mostly inhabited by Ukrainians and Russians. There were few Jewish families. All dwellers of the house made self-defense squads [Jewish self-defense movement] [8](#) no matter what nationality they were. They were not armed, just used the hatches and clubs. Our short-sighted father also took part in that squad.

### Growing up

I was born in 1918. I was named Rahil. In late 1917, before I was born, grandmother Rive-Malke came for a visit. I do not remember her, but my brother remembered that kind and beautiful woman. He always remembered her affectionately. Father worshiped her and siblings loved her very much. Grandmother was going to help my mother after I was born and then she planned to return to Olkeniki. Grandmother tended me, cooked food and watched elder children. Parents sold soap on the market and grandmother sent the elder brother to bring them food in the pots covered with towels. Then in 1918 Lithuania was severed from Russia [Lithuanian independence] [9](#), and grandmother turned out to be abroad. She was supposed to get the permit from the Soviet regime to come back home. She did not live to get it. She died in 1918 in Ekaterinoslav. She was buried in the local Jewish cemetery. She got the permit posthumously.

In 1919 there was the outbreak of cholera epidemic in Ekaterinoslav. People got sick and died. There was a serious unemployment. It was next to impossible to find a job. Father kept on making soap. Then he began buying tobacco from the peasants and resold it. Parents dried tobacco leaves, cut them and sold on the market. Then father managed to find a job at the metallurgic plant. He caught typhus fever during one of his trip to Kharkov. His distant relatives, who lived in Kharkov, looked after him. The Civil War was on and we and father were on different front lines. There were battles and artillery fire in Ekaterinoslav. We got used to the noise of the shells flying over our house. At night mother told us to lie down on the floor close to each other. She said if the shell was to hit our house, it would be better if all of us died at once. I was afflicted with measles. Mother decided to isolate me from brother and sister and put me in her room. The window shutters were closed for my eyes not to be irritated by the sunlight. When I was recovering, the shutters were open and there was a small aperture in the glass and a shell between the shutters and the window. Thus, closed shutters saved my life.

Once, when I was ill, the German squad came in our house. Mother offered the soldiers to take a seat and apologized that she had nothing to treat them with. She spoke German. The soldiers talked to my mom and left without taking anything. Armed people came in our yard in the carts. They say these were Makhno's [10](#) squads, but they did no harm to anybody. The other way around,

they were very generous. They took the loaves of wheat bread, the rolls of calico, cut them with sabers and gave to the kids who came up to them. Mother bewared them and told brother not to approach their carts. She was afraid that they would identify him as Jew and kill him with the saber.

We did not have fire wood, and the house was not heated. Mother caught cold. First she coughed and then hemoptysis started. The doctor said that she had a galloping consumption. I do not know how father found out about that but he crossed the front line. He was eager to treat my mom. He managed to get the medicine for her, fish liver oil, but nothing helped. Parents dreamt they would come to the pine forest and inhale the healing air. But these were only dreams. The war was on and we lived in the steppe part of Ukraine. In April 1921 my mother died at the age of 31. Evsey was going on the 7th year, Esfir was 5 and I was less than two. Mother was buried on the Jewish cemetery of Ekaterinoslav in accordance with the Jewish rite.

Father remained a widower with 3 little kids. It was hard for him to get over mother's death and he tried to comfort us. Mother's brother Abo-Simon came from Latvia to help out father. He was a citizen of Latvia and had the right to come back. Abo-Simon talked my father into leaving Ekaterinoslav for Kraziai, the motherland of my mom. It was not easy for us to get to Vitebsk [11](#) [240 km to the north-west from Moscow] and there we found out that Latvia-Russia border was closed. We understood that we would not be able to leave Kraziai, so he left by himself, I do not know that with him happened, we never saw him again. We must have been lucky that the border was closed, because during the first days of WW2 Latvia was occupied by Germans and Jews were exterminated. All our close relatives were killed by Germans: mother's brother Ehiel, his wife and 2 children, widow of Abo-Simon with two kids and other relatives whom I do not remember.

We stayed in Vitebsk. Father rented a poky room with the wooden floor and ramshackle walls. We lived there in the period of 1921-1926. We slept on the baskets with the clothes of my father's sister Neha. Before the outbreak of the WW1 Neha brought 3 large willow baskets with her things from Olkenikov to Ekaterinoslav fearing that her property would be plundered. Father watched the chattels of her sister and even when we were indigent her things remained untouched. He moved her things to Vitebsk from Ekaterinoslav, and from Vitebsk to Moscow to the evacuation, from one apartment to another. Her things remained they way they were. We started using those things when we got a notification about her death in the year of 1946.

In 1922 the mourning period was over for my father and he got married for the second time. His second wife was a Jew, Raisa Slobodkina. She was born in Kraziai in 1883. She knew grandfather Leizer and all his family very well. She studied in the same lyceum with my mother. She worked -as a librarian before the Revolution. Raisa took a hard cross by marrying a widower with three children. She diligently fulfilled her duty. She was a true loving and caring mother. In 1923 our younger brother Naum was born and in 1928 sister Maria. Raisa's single sister Hava also lived with us. There were 8 people in the family and father was the only one who worked. There was a raging unemployment in our country at that time. Father was on odd jobs. The family was indigent. In 1924 father went to Moscow hoping to find a job and lodging. He managed to find a job in construction and his salary was rather decent for those times. The better part of his salary was sent to us in Vitebsk. Soon the organization where my father worked was closed down and father remained jobless. Again he was looking for a job. As soon as he found one, he invited us in Moscow.

In 1926 we moved to father. We lived in one room of 9,5 sq. m. Father worked very hard. In 1928 he lost job again. Father and Raisa vended cigarettes. Only in 1929 father found a job at the construction site. He worked and studied at the evening department of Moscow construction institute. In spite of the fact that our living was very hard father managed to graduate from the institute.

I vividly remember the lane where we lived. There were 3 houses on each side. Those houses were so densely populated that the children from those houses would occupy several kindergartens. All families were large. Most of our neighbors were cabmen. There were few cars in Moscow and people mostly took the carriages. We lived in one room of a communal apartment [12](#). We were friendly, but life was hard on us. We did not have furniture. We still slept on the baskets of aunt Neha. We used Raisa's sawing-machine as a table. The most important for my parents was for us to be well fed and to be healthy. They always kept in mind that mother died from tuberculosis.

All our neighbors were Russian and we were the only Jewish family in the entire house. However we did not feel anti-Semitism coming from them, though. We got along very well and were on friendly terms. Though there was one exception: our neighbor, who worked for NKVD [13](#) as a janitor. She liked to eavesdrop to our conversations standing by our door.

Parents (I considered Raisa to be my mother and was always thankful to that wonderful woman and later on in my story I would refer to her as to my mother - the way I have been calling her all my life) spoke Yiddish between themselves but out of all children only elder brother Evsey understood it. First he went to cheder and then to the compulsory Jewish school. We, the younger, did not know Yiddish. Parents wanted us to speak pure Russian as they thought it would make our lives easier. Parents also knew how to write in Yiddish. Raisa even composed verses in Yiddish during war times. Unfortunately nothing was preserved. Parents also loved singing Jewish songs but they were doing it in sotto for our neighbor not to hear them.

I cannot say how religious my parents were. All I know is that they observed Jewish traditions. We had separate dishes for milk and meat courses and mother closely followed for us not to confuse anything. Mother enjoyed cooking traditional Jewish dishes. She was a good cook. We marked the major Jewish holidays in our family. Pesach was the sacred day for my parents. Even when there was a lack of products in Moscow father used to say: "How can we do without gefilte fish on Pesach?". He got up very early and spent hours in the lines to buy the fish and always managed to get fish home. Mother baked matzah and cooked traditional Paschal dishes. During the entire Paschal period there was no bread in the house, we ate only matzah. For Pesach we always had boiled chicken, gefilte fish, all kinds of tsimes, strudel with jam, raisins and nuts. We also had Paschal dishes, which were kept in a separate drawer. It was taken out only on Pesach. Parents fasted on Yom Kippur, but they did not make children do that. On Friday evening we had the rite to light the candles. Mother made a festive dinner. But on Saturday father went to work. It was an official working day and father could not miss it. Father had tallit and tefillin. Synagogue was rather far away from our house, but father went there on Saturday after work. Mother rarely went to the synagogue, on Jewish holidays. Parents did not teach us how to pray and did not tell us about the history of Jewish peoples. There were the years when the Soviet regime undertook an active struggle against religion [14](#) and parents did not want to aggravate the situation with our Jewish history for us not to stick out. Now, when I hear people sing Jewish songs and observe Jewish traditions openly I feel hurt for my parents who had to do it surreptitiously.

I went to Russian compulsory school at the age of 8. Our school was far from our house. There were

children of almost all our neighbors. Sometimes we walked to school. At times our neighbor, a drayman gave us a lift to school in his cart. I was a good student, though I did not get straight excellent marks. It did not take me long to do home work. When I had spare time I helped mother about the house, tended my little sister Maria, whom I loved very much. Mother's sister Hava, who lived with us, died shortly after we moved to Moscow. I saw that it was hard for mother to do all the chores by herself. Some adult in the yard told me that Raisa was not my birthmother, but it did not shake my love for her and my elder siblings also loved her very much. She was a kind and wise woman and treated us like her own children. I think my parents loved each other very much. I think only mutual love can create such harmony like in our family. Father was a friend who always gave a reasonable piece of advice and mother was there to comfort and care.

Unfortunately, we did not have relatives in Moscow. Almost all father's relatives left Russia. Mother's elder brother lived in Kharkov. He came over very rarely as he was not rich. We had kin in Kraziai and Vitebsk. Parents got along with them very well. Mother for instance kept friends with Mark Chagall. [15](#). All friends were Jews. Besides father was on good terms with his colleagues, school and institute friends. Not all of them were Jews. In our family nationality factor was not the most important one. The doors of our house were open to everybody. Mother liked to receive guests. She always tried to cook something delicious.

When I go back to my school years I understand that almost all my friends were Russian and the nationality factor did not stand in the way of our friendship. I did not feel anti-Semitism and did not even understand what it was like. I was a pioneer at school [All-Union pioneer organization] [16](#), then a Komsomol [17](#) member. I was an active member of society. I was very diligent and exigent. If I was given a task I strove to fulfill it no matter what impediments might arise.

Having graduated school I decided to enter medical institute. I made up my mind to become a doctor because mother's health was feeble and I hoped that I would be able to help her get better. There was a tough competition in Moscow Medical Institute. I did not enter the institute like many other entrants. I went to Kursk [about 480 km to the south from Moscow] and entered Medical Institute there. The institute was newly founded, viz. 2 years. It was in the premise of former prison. I lived in the hostel. I was keen on studies. Student's life appealed to me. In a year and a half I got ill. My elder brother Evsey came and took me to Moscow. In a year I transferred to Moscow Medical Institute, but I was in the first year again. Remarkable people, best doctors of the country, great scientists taught us medicine. They did not only teach us mere medicine, they nurtured good human qualities in us, to be responsible for our actions. Consequently I worked in Moscow municipal committee of the peoples' control before it was reformed and my boss once said that I would become a good attorney as I fought for the justice and the right cause. I told: "I would not make a bad doctor either". We were taught to write the history of the patient thinking that a criminal investigator was behind us. We were very responsible for our actions. There were Jews in the institute but we did not cluster together by national groups. We chose friends by interests.

In 1936-1937 repressions [Great Terror] [18](#) commenced. Fortunately it did not refer to my kin, but everybody understood that there was no guarantee that we would be safe from them. There was a Jew Evgeniy Katsnelson among my fellow students. He was from Voronezh. His father was the head of Voronezh military command. Evgeniy was a tall and handsome blond. At that time he was friends with the doctor of archbishop. Maybe it was the reason for his arrest. He was arrested in the middle of the lecture. He was 18 at that time. He was released in some time. My friends saw him

and said that he changed a lot. He was asked what it was like in Gulag [19](#), and he replied: "Those who were there, would never forget, and those who weren't would never understand". Children of 'peoples' enemies' [Enemy of the people] [20](#), whose parents were arrested, studied with me. They looked worried but they did not speak of their anxieties. We did not want to hurt them and did not broach the subject about their parents. I was too young and it was hard for me to understand what was going on without knowing their parents. But at the back of my mind I did not fully believe that 'peoples' enemies' were everywhere.

### During the war

In 1941 I finished 4 courses of the institute and had practice in Vyshniuy Volochka [about 300 km to the north west from Moscow] together with 10 girls. I clearly remember the outbreak of war, on the 22nd June of 1941 [Great Patriotic War] [21](#). It was a warm sunny day boding no tribulation. We went swimming to the river. When we were on the way back from the beach we heard on the radio (there were loud-speaker outdoors) that the war was unleashed. We immediately began to think what to do. We went to the chief doctor of Vyshniy Volochek. He told us: "It's up to you", he did not have time to bother with us. Then we decided that it was time for us to come back to Moscow. It was hard and painstaking to get to Moscow. It was next to impossible to buy the tickets to Moscow. We turned grown-up swiftly being serious and sensible. The roads were crowded with people carrying children and their things, we understood that it was a calamity. First we walked, then we were given a lift by the passing vehicles. We tried to keep together. By the fall we managed to get to Moscow. When we came back to Moscow, our institute had been already evacuated. Our documents were scattered around the institute building. It was October 1941. Moscow was panic stricken. Germans were approaching Moscow. We started looking for the documents and managed to find them. It was written in our documents that each of us was a doctor, having finished only 4 courses, but not a full course of studies.

At home it turned out that the organization where my father worked was evacuated to Kuibyshev [now Samara, about 950 km to the east from Moscow] together with the employees and their families. My parents left as well. Our family was scattered all over the country. Younger sister Maria was in the pioneer's camp. All children from the camp were taken somewhere without parents preliminary being informed. It took pains for my mother to find out that the children were taken in the vicinity of Saratov. She went there to that pioneer camp, in a disastrous state, and took Maria to Kuibyshev. Elder brother Evsey had defended dissertation [Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [22](#), he was promised a brilliant future. He was on the business trip. Elder sister Esfir graduated from Moscow Engineering and Construction Institute and worked as per mandatory job assignment [Mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [23](#) in Ural. I and my younger brother Naum remained in Moscow. In 1941 Naum finished the first course of Moscow Energy Institute, Automation Department. Almost at the same time we came to the military enlistment office and voluntarily joined the Soviet Army. Naum was in the artillery troops and in 1942 he was killed in action in the bounds of Kerch. Evsey was sent to tank troops.

I happened to be in Kuibyshev, where SES (Sanitary and Epidemiology Squad) #35 was formed. Each army had its own SES. Our squad was by 48th attack army and followed the army, sometimes even being ahead of the troops. Personnel and laboratories were in the emergency trucks covered with tarpaulin. I was sent to Elets [360 km to the South from Moscow] to get the emergency vehicles. I was assigned the head of the column and was to get the vehicles to Bryansk front [350



km to the south-west from Moscow]. It was November 1941. I was a young girl and all drivers were men much older than me. There was a military doctor Egorov with us. He turned out to be an alcoholic. He drank up all spirit which was given to us for medical purpose.

Sanitary and epidemiologic unit takes credit that there was no outbreak of epidemic for the entire period of war neither in the front lines nor in partisan squads. A lot of preventive measures were taken. Chambers of sanitary processing also were a great achievement. In battle conditions militaries did have a chance to change their clothes. Nobody took bath after staying in the trenches. So the uniforms were processed in those chambers, so there were no epidemics. Moreover, I think that physicians did colossal work with the help of the leading experts were highly-skilled professors, academicians. They managed to assist the army.

SES work was dangerous and hard. There was time when I was about to stay in Pinsk marshes for good. It was winter. Medical assistant Klyuev and I were on our way back from the place where we were to fulfill the task. The ice was not strong enough and we fell in ice-cold water. My heavy rubber boots stuck to the bottom and it appeared that I would never be able to get out of the bog. But I did! I was afflicted with polyarthritis. My legs hurt and got swollen so I had to cut my boots. Besides during the war times I was wounded and got a contusion. We were caught in the fire and I had a light fragment wound in the knee-joint. The bone remained untouched. I was in the hospital.

When it was time for me to be discharged from the hospital they suggested that I should stay there for medical service as an attending physician of field mobile hospital of attack army #48. My military service was over in this hospital and my career was ended at the rank of acting head of the department. Being in the ranks of that army I went to Bryansk, Central, 1st attack army and Far East fronts. It was on the leading edge. Our hospital was called 'first line' hospital. It meant that we were in the immediate vicinity of the front line. The wounded were taken to us straight from the trenches. Moreover, we did not stay in one place longer than for 2-3 days. The hospital moved on trucks, sleighs and carts. Good thing if we managed to settle in any houses, but usually we lived in the tents, 25 people in each. We also operated in the tents as well. The entire medical staff lived in the tents, including the chief surgeon. He was offered a separate place, but he said: "No, I will stay only with the girls". The partitions were made with the bed sheets. We slept on the floor. Bunks were made only for the wounded. There was no comfort at all. It was hard for ladies to keep hygiene as there were no special uniforms for women. For instance there was no underwear for ladies. It was good that we were given head kerchiefs and we made bras from them. We were clad in military uniform: rubber boots and overcoat. The uniform was not given by size, just whatever commissary had in stock. We put the documents in the breast pockets of the blouse. We were supposed to carry them always as there was no place to keep them. There was no certain place to sleep. We had to stay in the tents even during winter if there no houses close by.

The hospital was receiving patients - round o'clock. I do not remember how many wounded we had per day on the average. All I know is that there were days when there were hundreds of wounded. The medical personnel had to sleep for 2-3 hours per day. There were only 8 doctors and the rest were nurses. Wounded were carried by the nurses and orderlies (out of those who were recovering). In the event when there were a lot of wounded after the battle, everybody, including all doctors, took the stretchers and carried the wounded. Patients were also brought from medical battalion and from the leading edge. Though, medical battalion was supposed to take the wounded from the battle field and from there the wounded were taken to our hospital. But in fact, it was not

observed. There were times when the medical battalion and our hospital were in different places. Sometimes we stood in front of the medical battalion, in the immediate vicinity. That is why orderlies from the front line took the wounded straight to us. We were supposed to allocate the wounded very swiftly - some of them could be taken to more remote tents, others were to be operated on immediately. The flow of wounded was very large. The patients were taken in sleighs, carts, horses and freight cars. They came to us and then they were to be taken to the clearing hospital. We were supposed to assist the wounded. Severely wounded were sent in the rear and those who had lighter wounds were operated on the table, treated for a while before going back to the lines.

Out of 8 surgeons only two of them had practice in operations and the six, who were to become therapists, neurologists or oculists. I was specialized in pediatrics. The six girls had spent hours by the operating table. Every day there were lectures in field surgery and simultaneous exams. The lectures were held by the chief physician of the hospital Alexander Pavlov and his deputy, the leading surgeon Peter Illionov right in the middle of the operation, in the tent imbued in blood, passing from one operating table. We were asked: "What are you to do next? What will be your steps?" Those teachers had a vast experience. They were wonderful experts in abdominal operations. The first war years, when the army was retreating, were very fierce in all respects. We performed a load of work - over 73% of the wounded were put in the lines. I was straight from the university, without any practical experience and expertise and there was always a consultant by me. Of course, diagnostics was of paramount importance, especially in our conditions. There was no way to prove. Our mentors close by helped us to diagnose, especially taking into the conditions. They were near no matter what. There was no way we could be mistaken. The leading surgeon and the chief physician of the hospital were constantly advising us and stayed close. They treated us very well, with understanding. I think they made true doctors out of us. I deeply respect them and thank for everything. I will always keep them in my heart. I did not look like an experienced doctor. I remember there was a case of gas gangrene. The colonel was supposed to be operated immediately and was to conduct the operation as the leading surgeon was scheduled to perform abdominal operations. The colonel refused and said: "I do not trust my life to the callow girl". I came to the chief physician of the hospital, the major, and reported that the patient was against my operating him, however gas gangrene was to be operated immediately. The chief physician came to the colonel and said that unfortunately there was no other doctor available and he would be thankful to that 'callow youth'. I made the operation and we were able to save his leg. The patient was sent to the evacuation hospital and I never saw him again. I received a lot of thank-you letters from the patients whom I operated.

There was a lack of medicine and bandage materials. We, the medics, found the way out. We washed the bandages and made the contraptions from the fence boards to transport the wounded as well as splints and crutches. We were supposed to be gumptious and brave. We studied military field surgery at the institute, but in actuality things were different. We had to come up with all kinds of mobile bandages and find a solution how to transport the wounded without injuring him. We made a use of everything we saw. We were supplied with narcosis for amputation and pills on time. We enjoyed launch of penicillin production was launched and we started to use it. When there was an abdominal wounded we put a lot of penicillin for disinfection. We also had portable disinfection chambers. The clothes were decontaminated as the soldiers were lice-ridden because they did not have a chance to take a bath. We did not recognize the world wary. We did not accept

'I cannot', 'I do not know how', we only knew 'I must'. We had been working hard round o'clock. Now, when I recollect the military years I am thinking how could we possibly stand that? Maybe we were young and it was easier. War made us sturdy. We did not think of ourselves nor felt sorry for ourselves. My main job was to amputate arms and legs. It was hard to conduct such operation for young people both from the moral and physical standpoint. I was supposed to hold on heavy amputated part. I also operated on light abdominal wounds and lungs.

We were fed pretty well. We ate the same things as the wounded, who were supposed to have good calories to get better. We also were supposed to test food before it was given to the wounded, made the menu for the wounded and calculate the calories. As far as I remember one egg was equal to 125 grams of meat in terms of calories. Egg powder was widely used. We had our own cooks. I cannot judge how skilled they were but the food was fresh and there was no stealing. I remember we were given canned sausage. We facetiously called it 'Roosevelt's smile'. The sausage was supplied from America as the assistance in accordance with lend-lease [Editor's note: lend-lease is the system of transfer (loan or lease) of weaponry, ammunition, strategic raw materials, provision etc.; supplies in terms of lend-lease were made by USA to the ally-countries on anti-Hitler coalition in the period of the second world war. The law on lend-lease was adopted by USA Congress in 1941]. Egg powder was also American. We received additional ration. Men were given cigarettes and the ladies German chocolate. The officers were also given 25 grams of cookies per day and we shared it with everybody. Though, cookies were not given every day. I cannot say that we were starving. There was no luxury, but there was no famish either. There were times when there was no chance for us to grab a bite because there was a large flow of the wounded. The most important was to assist the wounded and feed them. It took a long time to operate, then there was a break and we were supposed to save sterile materials and hands. Sweet tea was brought to the operation table to support us. At times we did not care for food as there was a lack of spirit and our hands were supposed to be sterile. Sometimes we had to process our hands with iodine no matter that our hands would be burnt.

Our 'idol', the surgeon Ivanov had one pet peeve. That intelligent person swore like a bargee during the operation and I could not get used to it. After contusion I was delirious. Once, my friends heard me swearing in my delirium: "Shame on you! I have never heard such expressions at home!" - it was the way I talked to Ivanov in my dream. He was informed about that. He felt ashamed and calmed down.

I also remember the episode in Bryansk forests when our troops were retreating. There were great many wounded. The hospital dislocated in the forest and was scattered in different huts. There was an aerodrome close by. Suddenly I received the order from the chief physician of the hospital regarding evacuation. I was supposed to stay with the severely wounded in lungs and abdomen, who could not be transported. I was given a truck but taking into account the state of the wounded I would not use it anyway. In the evening the aircraft landed by the hospital. I was so surprised when I saw the pilot, my Moscow acquaintance Anatoliy Kiselev, the former cadet of aviation school of Tushinskiy aerodrome. In 1939 being a student of the medical institute I had a part-time job on the aerodrome on the night duty. I met Anatoliy there. We had not seen each other since. Anatoliy said that Germans were expected here pretty soon and offered his help. I said that the most important task for me was to evacuate the wounded and Anatoliy promised to assist me in that. Before soon the whole squadron flew and they loaded the wounded in the planes. Hardly had we

taken off, when the Germans occupied the place we left. We were taken to the hospital.

Battles in the vicinity of Kursk [Kursk battle] [24](#) laid an imprint on me as there was a large flow of the wounded. We hardly ate and slept as there were constant operations. My legs were swollen because I had been standing by the operating table for a long time. I will always bear in mind forced crossing of Dnestr in fall 1943. Our troops were attacking. Our army was supposed to undergo forced crossing. We turned out to be in Rechitse [about 1500 km to the South-West from Moscow]. By that time I was acting chief of the department. We settled at school, not far from the river. I still remember the school building, where our hospital was positioned. I vividly remember the layout. The entire 4-storied building was occupied with numerous wounded. The battles were fierce. Our troops managed to cross Dnestr, but could not go further as they were besieged. We operated on the school desks. We used kerosene or gasoline lamps instead of operation lamps. Suddenly one of the lamps fell and desks were on fire. I did not think of myself at that moment. I tried to admonish the wounded from knowing about the fire but they were panic-mongers. We tried hard to put out the fire by using our jackets and some of the convalescing patients were helping us. We managed to quench the fire and at that time the commandment came over to see us - army commander, front commander, several generals. I made the report on the situation. They looked at me and burst into laughter. I did not understand what was happening. It turned out that they were laughing at my face, dirty with soot. I was conferred Great Patriotic War Order of the second class [25](#) for quenching the fire.

There were 2 Jews in the hospital - I and doctor Maya Borisovna. Both the doctors and wounded treated us very well. We did not feel any anti-Semitism. During one of the hardest period - when our army was retreating - the chief physician told me not to leave far from the territory as I might get into trouble because of my nationality. Everybody knew that fascists were exterminating Jews. I had never heard any disrespectful word towards me. I knew that Germans were exterminating Jews, taking them to ghettos, concentration camps, but I did not know the details. When the war was winding we liberated 2 concentration camps. I have not seen those camps. The army entered the camps, we just received the wounded and sick from there. We also treated civilian Germans and military captives. Maybe I should take more interest in the thing not relating to my job, but in the first place I was to be responsible for the patients I was treating. There were only few German captives. We treated them as human beings. I think that common people should not be responsible for the things happening. They suffered as well, either themselves or their families. The leaders and commanders were to blame. Rank and file Germans just were fulfilling the orders of their commanders.

In autumn 1944 I took the floor at the conference of the front-line surgeons as a representative of the military surgeons attack army #48. My report on 'Surgical methods of thorax treatment' was approved by chief front-line surgeon, general Akhutin. He told me that it was a real dissertation and suggested that I should enroll for residency training.

When I was in the front lines, I joined the Party. It stood to reason for me as I considered myself to be a true communist. Like most of people I believed in Party. I was involved in active social work being a Party member. When I was working in the hospital I was the chairman of the local committee [Mestkom] [26](#), the secretary of Party organization. I was rather industrious.

We were very young during the war. If we if those were peaceful times it would be the age of love and sizzling passion. Front-lines were not the right place for love affairs. All thoughts and instincts were directed towards rescuing lives and assisting people. Many lives were saved and each case was unique. None of our wounded was stricken with post-operation gas gangrene. Surgeons can understand how hard it must have been for us. We made strap discussions on the leg in order to prevent gangrene and it helped. It did not do anything at random. Our mentor taught us how to diagnose properly. Besides, we were supposed to brief our mentor on the plan of operation before we started it. By the end of war we were considered to be experienced surgeons and our mentors trusted us to work independently. I thought over all my steps before each operation. 10 years passed after war and I still saw in my dreams the operation I was doing during the war times. I woke up so tired as if it was in real life.

When Königsberg [27](#) [about 1000 km to the west from Moscow] was captured by our troops in 1945 our army stopped. Battles were held on another front line, out of Berlin. We were in high spirits. It was warm spring and everybody understood that the war was coming to an end. We did not stay by Königsberg for a long time. Then we got on freight cars and went to another destination. Nobody told us where we were heading. The commander of the hospital was given a package with the order. He was supposed to open it in certain point. We were on the road for a long time. When the train stopped we were told that we came to Moscow. We were rejoicing! They did not even let us take off the train. In Moscow the chief of the hospital opened up the package and we found out that we were heading for Far East. In Moscow we found about the capitulation of Germany on the 9th of May 1945. We were exulting. Nobody knew that new war was ahead of us, the Japanese war [War with Japan] [28](#).

It was the time when we thought what was happening to our kin. I corresponded with my parents and knew what was going on with them. My parents and Maria were in evacuation. Life was hard on them. They were starving. Father was the only one who worked and I sent them my officer's certificate. When in 1943 there was no threat that Germans would besiege Moscow and Muscovites were coming back, I was given solicitation in my headquarters regarding return of my family to Moscow. They came back in 1943. First they were looking for the way to settle down and make a living. Parents bought some haberdashery items in Moscow and resold them to the suburbs and hamlets out of Moscow. With time father managed to find a job in some state organization. I already knew that my younger brother Naum died in the vicinity of Kerch in 1942. I felt hurt as I cared for my brother. I did not know what happened to my brother and sister. I wanted to visit my family, but I had no time as the train was about to depart.

We turned out to be in Manchuria [Editor's note: The Japanese occupied Manchuria (North-Eastern province of China, bordering with Mongolia) in 1941. The Soviet Army begun to attack the Japanese occupiers from Soviet and Mongolian territory in August 1945.]. There were no large military operations, but still we had some work to do. The war in Manchuria was over very quickly, on the 3rd of September 1945. There were no fierce battles, but there was another fear. Most of all we were appalled by kamikaze, who slaughtered our soldiers. During one of my trips I met my friend Raisa Tsipkina. We worked together in SES #35 . She still was in that squad. We hugged each other and cried. After having military actions we were allowed to go to Kharbin. We went to the opera theatre to see the opera by Puccini Chio-Chio-San [Madame Butterfly]. We girls felt ourselves terrible in military uniform and rubber boots among dressed up women.

They wanted to send me to Kurile Islands [over 7000 km to the east from Moscow], but there was the order on demobilization. So I was demobilized from the army and I was sent to Moscow to study. Instead of finishing the 5th grade I was supposed to go through residency training.

I got couple of governmental awards for the work in the front-line hospital. In summer 1942 I was awarded with the 'Medal for Military Merits' [29](#) for evacuation of the wounded in Bryansk vicinity. My second award, the 'Order of the Red Star' [30](#) was conferred in 1944 for work in the hospital in Eastern Prussia. There were a lot of wounded there. I got Great Patriotic War Order of the 2nd class for liquidation of the fire in Rechitse, when hundreds of wounded were saved. Our army and front took part in large operations: Kursk battle and operation 'Bagration' in Belorussia. I was awarded with medals for both of these operations. Besides I was awarded the 'Medal for Capture of Konigsberg' [31](#), the 'Medal for Victory over Germany' [32](#), the 'Medal for Victory over Japan' [33](#). On the occasion of 50-year anniversary of the victory in WW2 I was awarded Great Patriotic War Order of the first class. In post war period I was awarded with the medals to commemorate the jubilee dates of WW2 and Soviet Army.

### After the war

War left a trace. I could not listen to music for a long time. When I heard the march, I burst into tears. I still cannot listen to military marches, watch movies about war because too deep the imprint is.

I was demobilized in June 1946 and left Manchuria in late fall. When I came back home, I was a different person, not the student girl. I could not get over Naum's death. We were bonded though he was younger than me. Naum was gifted. He was an excellent student at school. He was fond of physics, poetry, chess, swimming, rowing. He was an avid reader. I took it hard because it was the son of Raisa, my second mother. I came back alive, and he was killed. I felt guilty. I came back to my parents to the same apartment, where my mother and sister Maria lived. Then brother Evsey came back from the front lines. There was no room for all of us. Evsey rented lodging and was on his own. I had lived with my parents until 1961.

When I came back to Moscow, I tried to become a post-graduate student. I had to go through residency training first. Anti-Semitism was not only observed in every day life, but at the state level as well. It was hard for me, a Jew, to enter. I decided not to regain pediatrics studies (it was my specialty at the institute). I had to amputate too often... I was afraid that my heart hardened and I would not be able to treat children. I applied for surgery chair, but I was not admitted there because of my nationality. None of the Jews was admitted. It was the first time when I came across state anti-Semitism, which was not felt before the war.

I managed to go to the chair of radio and nuclear medicine, but I could not finish it as I was afflicted with leucopenia because of working with x-ray machines. Doctors prohibited me to work in the field of radio and nuclear medicine, but knowledge, acquired in residency training were used further on in my work. I took different refreshment courses and became multi-field doctor. After unsuccessful attempt to finish residency training, I had to look for a job. It was the year of 1948 there was a rotten air of anti-Semitism. Fortunately the deputy head of the chief therapeutic physician was Ivanov, my former boss during the war. Of course, he hired me. I had worked there for 23 years as a common surgeon with intermission during oncology courses. Having finished

oncology courses, I became oncologist-surgeon.

Beginning from 1948 cosmopolite processes [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [34](#) commenced in USSR. It was a hard period for the Jewish intelligentsia. There were multiple articles in press regarding divulgement of another cosmopolite, a Jew. Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [35](#) was shattered no matter how much it did for the victory in WW2. Many of its members were shot and the rest were sent to Gulag. In 1948 a great actor and bright person Solomon Mikhoels [36](#) was assassinated. Though his death was an imitated accident. It was a tragedy for us. I did not see many of his performances in the theatre, but my parents were theater-goers and loved Mikhoels. It was hard for them to get over his death. When 'the Doctors Plot' [37](#) was commenced in 1953, two months before Stalin's death, I understood that it was a blatant lie. I was mostly shocked by arrest of Lina Stern [38](#). She came back from Switzerland intending to help the Soviet regime and exerted her every effort in that. She did not have a family and dedicated her life to work. She taught physiology at our courses. When Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was founded Lina took an active part in it. Neither me nor my colleagues could possibly believe that this petite and fragile woman could have been 'peoples' enemy'! We did not believe that all those brilliant people were guilty. But we could not say anything about it as we understood that we were fraught with danger. Only Stalin's death in 1953 saved our country from further repressions.

Once in February 1950, engineer Yuri Shabad came to our hospital to see a doctor. It was a fateful visit. Soon Yuri married me. Yuri was born in Minsk in 1913. He came of intelligentsia. His father was a professor and his mother graduated from a lyceum. There were a lot of bright scientists in the Shabad family: oncologist Ivan Shabad, Yuri's uncle, mathematician Shabad, economist Shabad, physician Shabad, who work with academician Sakharov [39](#). Yuri remained an orphan pretty early. His father died when he was 7 and his mother died when he turned 22. He had younger siblings: sister Evgenia and brother Isidor, who was the bread-winner because Yuri worked and studied in the evening institute. He became electric engineer. His sister became a gynecologist and his brother graduated from chemical department of Minsk institute. Before we met Yuri was married to a Russian woman Valentina Blokhina (after getting married she did not take his name) and their daughter Natalia Blokhina was born in 1941. She took her mother's name. In his sister's words they were having tiffs and finally they broke up. When the war was unleashed Yuri was confined to barracks at military plant. He worked there as a leading engineer. At the end of the war Yuri was sent to Germany, where he was supposed to taken part in repatriation of arms. My parents's bosom friend was a distant relative of Yuri Shabad. He asked me to examine her 9-year old daughter Natalia. Doctors suspected that she had rheumatic heart disease. I agreed. He took her to me and since that day we started seeing each other. He often met me after work. He suggested that we should go on vacation together. I refused because he was married and went to Sochi by myself [Editor's note: Black Sea resort town in the Caucasus about 1600 km south of Moscow. Popular Russian resort, specialized in treatment of digestive apparatus and metabolism. There were over 20 mineral springs, used in treatment.] Soon, I received a letter from him saying if I refused him he would feel wretched by the end of his days. He was very attractive and had the gift of a gab. My mother also liked him. Yuri proposed to me and I agreed to marry him. On the 5th of August 1950 we got married. We registered our marriage in a regional marriage registration office. In the evening we had a party with our relatives and friends. We could not even think of a traditional Jewish wedding back at that time. Both of us were communists, so it was impossible for us.

Both Yuri and I had neither money nor a lodging. We lived with our parents in a room of 10 sq. m. Yuri was also to pay alimony for his daughter. His salary was skimpy and my salary was not that big, but he had never heard a reproach from me regarding the lack of money. Father taught his children how to get by with what you've got. We had lived that way for 32 years. We got along with his daughter from the first marriage. Our daughter Sofia named after my deceased mother was born in 1951, when we lived with our parents. When my daughter was born her baby-sitter also moved in our 10 sq. m. apartment. We made a partition with the wardrobe and put bed for the baby-sitter on another side. My daughter was premature born and quite feeble. I was taking good care of her. I had to work a lot and came home late at night. Sofia was missing me and did not go to sleep before I came. I fed her, tucked her in bed at night. In the morning she was sleeping, when I left for work. Mother cared for Sofia and loved her even more than other grandchildren. Once our neighbor told my daughter that Raisa was not her full-blood grandmother and that her full-blood grandmother passed away. It was a hard conversation for me. I said that I considered Raisa to be my mother because she raised me and taught me everything I knew. I also told her about my love for her and added if my daughter did not love her grandmother, it meant she did not love mother either. We never broached the subject again. Sofia and Raisa cared for each other. When I gave money to Sofia to buy a tit-bit, she bought something for grandmother. Raisa brought up Sofia very well. She taught her good manners. Sofia was a very pretty girl and I tried to dress her well. There was hardly anything pretty in the store and tried to do something by myself. When I was on duty at night I was sawing some piece and then stitched it at home.

In the post-war period father worked as a deputy chief of the legal department of a large construction trusts. He retired at the age of 72. He kept in touch with us. He got along with grandchildren. Sofia was his favorite. Gradually father's health weakened, he could hardly walk. He died in 1968. He is buried at Vostryakovskoye cemetery in Moscow.

Even after war my parents kept religious traditions. When we lived with them, we marked Jewish holidays together. When we lived separately we came over to their place to mark Jewish holidays. We understood how important it was for them. We did not observe those traditions in our family. Our daughter was aware that she was a Jew, but she was not raised in accordance with the Jewish religion and Jewish traditions.

We had a lot of friends. I had school and university friends. There were friends among my colleagues as well. Of course, my husband and daughter had their own friends. Guests were welcome in our house. Some of them found no pretext to come over. They just came to chat. On the occasion of birthday or celebration of soviet holidays we had to invite friends in several rounds as our apartment was too poky. We always celebrated 1st of May, 7th of November [October Revolution Day] [40](#), New Year's Day, Soviet Army Day [41](#) and Victory Day [42](#). We liked to spend vacations in the hamlet out of Moscow. We rented a room from the locals not far from the pond. Sometimes I went to the sanatorium to treat my legs. I have always felt the consequences of my 'bath' in Pinsk marshes and wound.

Being a veteran of war I got a separated 2-room apartment in 1968. My daughter had her own room. Sofia was finishing school and she had to study a lot. The same year she entered Moscow Construction Institute following in the footsteps of my father and elder siblings. She was a good student. In 1973 Sofia married a Jew, Mikhail Tulchinskiy. He was her fellow student. They had a common wedding: got registered in state marriage registration office and in the evening had a



wedding party at home. Our kin and friends were invited. There were a lot of people. Sofia lived separately, but she called us and grandparents everyday and was concerned with our problems. In 1974 mother passed away. In 2 years the most terrible thing happened in my life: my daughter died. She was stricken with cancer, having taken her life very quickly, the way it usually happens with young people. I, the oncologist, could not save my only daughter from that dreadful disease. My heart is still bleeding because of that. My husband was taking it very hard. In 1982 he passed away. He, my daughter and my mother were buried on Jewish Vostryakovskoye cemetery in Moscow.

My brother Evsey graduated from Moscow construction institute, Heating and Ventilation Department. During WW2 he was a volunteer in the front lines and had been in the tank troops for the whole war. He defended his thesis before the outbreak of war. In the post-war period he defended doctorate dissertation and published over 700 scientific articles. He was a great scientist, professor, then academician. Evsey was married to a Jew. I do not remember her name. They had 3 children: twins Leonid and Victor born in 1946 and daughter Elena born in 1955. Victor died in 1965. Evsey died in 2000. He was buried on Jewish Vostryakovskoye cemetery in Moscow.

My sister Esfir graduated Moscow Construction Institute, the Faculty of Concrete Constructions before the outbreak of war. Upon graduation she worked in the town Verkhnyaya Salda [about 1400 km to the east from Moscow] at metallurgic plant. After war she came back to Moscow and was enrolled at the design institute Stalproject. She became a wonderful designer. My sister had worked for 41 years at Stalproject and retired in 1981. Esfir had lived with her parents all her life, she could not make her own family. She is currently living by herself. She does not repine and does not feel lonely.

Having finished school my younger sister Maria entered Moscow Aviation Institute, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. Maria had worked at the same enterprise until retirement, i.e 1986. In 1951 she married a Jew Lev Titov. In 1953 their only daughter Maria was born. Being retired my sister Maria helped raising grandchildren: Evgeniy and Inna. Thanks to her the family was doing well. Maria died in 2003. She was buried on Jewish Vostryakovskoye cemetery in Moscow.

I had worked for the acqua hospital until 1970. It was hard for me to conduct operations and be on duty in the hospital. I was employed by the policlinic and I had consulting hours with patients. Besides, it took me a long time to get to the hospital from my house, and the policlinic was not far away. I had worked there until 1984. I had stayed by myself. My daughter is dead and my husband is dead. I decided there was no need for me to earn money and I just would get by with the pension. I had other tasks: to get the tombstones done and attend the cemetery. It is hard for me to get over my solitude. I am like a fish out of water. I would like to breathe, but there is no way I can inhale. Old age and loneliness are the hardest when you are ailing and when you are not capable of doing things you need.

When in the 1970s mass immigration of Jews to Israel commenced, I was not willing to leave. When my father died and my mother stayed by herself, I could not leave anyway. I never disapproved of those who made up their minds to immigrate. I do not think I am entitled to judge them. Many of my pals and colleagues left at that time. I did my best to assist them. People who were on the bound of immigration were supposed to process the documents for immigration in Moscow even if they lived in other cities. All of my acquaintances who came to Moscow on that purpose, stayed in

our place. I thought the most important thing was to offer people a place to stay. When I stayed by myself I was reluctant to leave. If my loved ones were alive, I would think that over. For me to be far away from the graves of my close relatives is like death in itself. The memory of them is alive while I am alive and if I leave they would die for the second time. I tried to get their tombstones installed as soon as possible because I did not think I would have a long life, but I did. I turned out to be strong.

When I was retired I took up social work in Moscow Committee of Veterans of War. First I was in the international group then I became the secretary of the international committee. The Japanese group was founded and I was offered a job in it. In actuality, Russian Committee of Veterans of War consists of 21 groups of international committees. The groups are classified by countries. In 1988 the group of veterans consisting of 30 people came to us from Israel. The team leader was a Polish Jew Abram Kowen. He is fluent in Russian, He loves Russian songs and sings very well. He knows Russia very well as he was the 2nd secretary of the Israeli embassy in Russia until 1967. Abram Kowen is the leader of the Jewish Council of Veterans of War and Disabled. He is the smartest person. He established things so well that he gained respect both of the government and the veterans of war. When they came over we began to found the Israeli group. The former title of the group was 'Israeli Group War Veterans Relations' and now the group is called 'Russia-Israel. We are part and parcel of Russian Committee of Veterans of War. We correspond with each other and exchange opinions. I also receive magazine from them. Now the book 'The book of memory' [Remembrance book] is being published. There is a search of those who perished during the war and their documents. Artificial limbs are made in Israel. We come to each other for a visit. I organized a group in 1991 and remained its leader for 4-5 years. Then I understood that it was hard for me, so another leader was elected, viz. Peter Bograd. In two years he refused from being a leader due to his state of health and we elected another leader: Alexander Tsvey. We have a lot of work to do. Each of the group member is responsible for certain tasks. Several people from our group were invited to celebrate the Victory day in Israel. I also was in that delegation. We get together at least once a month to discuss different issues. The Committee of War Veterans is contented with our work. We do not get any funding. Each of us annually contributes 100 rubles [Editor's note: \$3,3]. There are 36 people in our group. So, this is all we have got. We spend this money on correspondence and at times for payment of the telephone conversations. We collect additional money when some delegations are coming over. We mark jubilees. We address to our management on these occasions. They give us jubilee prizes. Those who made the most contribution in work, are given precious gifts, mostly watches.

I was deeply impressed by my trip to Israel. I consider Israel to be a great state. It was a real feat to make a true oasis from a bare desert. It is blooming now. Israeli people are very industrious. I am ravished by their organizational skills. The citizens of this wonderful country also have a lot of sorrow. There are incessant terrorist actions. I admire Israeli youth, their sincere patriotic spirit. I am pleased to see how proud they are to wear military uniform. I was told if a young man was not drafted in the army for some reason, he takes it as real sorrow. I worship that country, its peoples. From the bottom of my heart I wish them peace and welfare.

I did not quite get the events taken place in late 1980s, namely perestroika [43](#) in USSR, initiated by General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party Mikhail Gorbachev [44](#). In my opinion, perestroika was supposed to be gradual. For instance, they could start from agriculture - give the opportunity for the rural people to get property rights for land, till it and sell the products. In reality

things were happening simultaneously, which undermined much, without having restored. Medicine is my cup of tea. It is still in the wane. The doctors, working in the polyclinic are illiterate. They are occupied with prescriptions, which are not correct sometimes. I feel like a culprit schoolgirl when I come to see a doctor. I think the diagnostics is missing. We used to have conferences, ward rounds. Now there is nothing like that. When I was working, we had been constantly studying, attending some sort of courses. I do not know whether it is happening now. I had to stay in the hospital and I had never come across a skillful doctor. As for other fields, industry is practically busted. Now practically all manufactured goods are imported, Russian ones are few and of low quality. It is good that the borders are open, but it is not affordable for everybody to go abroad. You have got to know foreign language and have money to go abroad.

I do not resort to the help of Jewish charitable organizations. I think their assistance is not sufficient and humiliating to a certain extent. I have enough money for myself. Being a veteran of war my pension is a little bit higher than of a common pensioner. Since childhood I had been taught by my parents that my expenses should correspond to my income. That is why I do not even crave for things I cannot afford. Maybe my apartment is not as good as others, but the most important thing is that it is neat and tidy for the visitors to enjoy staying in it. The worst thing for me is to feel sorry for myself. I think at any age you can overcome hardships if you have a head on your shoulders. So far I can get over my ailments and feebleness. I have to do everything by myself. I do not even to think what might have happened if I am completely inapt. I feel that it is getting harder and harder with years, especially for the last 4 years. My eyesight became poor as well. When I was on the cemetery I lost consciousness. When I bent I felt that I could not see anything. I was stricken with thrombosis of the temporal artery and retina hemorrhage. Then I lost my voice. I was disable to speak for 9 months. Then I had a complicated arm fracture and finally I was afflicted with hypertension. Of course, I feel my age, but I am telling everybody that I am well. I am getting tired but I do not want to burden anybody with my maladies. I had to face death for so many times that my views changed. I understand that I had to fight and nobody could do it for you. Sometimes I do not want to get up in the morning and I am telling myself "Comrade Shabad, nobody is here to help you. There is no use in staying in bed, all the same you have to get up" and I am getting up. Besides, hard military years exhausted me and gave me stamina. I did not know the words 'I can't' or 'don't want'. I knew one word 'I need'. This is the main word for me.

## **GLOSSARY:**

### **1 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

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

## **2 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

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

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

4 Percent of Jews admitted to higher educational institutions: In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

## **5 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.

## **6 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.

## **7 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.

## **8 Jewish self-defense movement**

In Russia Jews organized self-defense groups to protect the Jewish population and Jewish property from the rioting mobs in pogroms, which often occurred in compliance with the authorities and, at times, even at their instigation. During the pogroms of 1881–82 self-defense was organized spontaneously in different places. Following pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century, collective defense units were set up in the cities and towns of Belarus and Ukraine, which raised money and bought arms. The nucleus of the self-defense movement came from the Jewish labor parties and their military units, and it had a widespread following among the rest of the people. Organized defense groups are known to have existed in 42 cities.

## **9 Lithuanian independence**

A part of the Russian Empire since the 18th century, Lithuania gained independence after WWI (1918), as a result of the collapse of its two powerful neighbors, Russia and Germany. Although resisting the attacks of Soviet-Russia successfully, Lithuania lost to Poland the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city of Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius) in 1920, claimed by both countries, and as a result they remained in war up until 1927. In 1923 Lithuania succeeded in occupying the previously French-administered (since 1919) Memel Territory and port (Klaipeda). The Lithuanian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

## **10 Makhno, Nestor (1888-1934)**

Ukrainian anarchist and leader of an insurrectionist army of peasants which fought Ukrainian nationalists, the Whites, and the Bolsheviks during the Civil War. His troops, which numbered 500 to 35 thousand members, marched under the slogans of ‘state without power’ and ‘free soviets’. The Red Army put an end to the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine in 1919 and Makhno emigrated in 1921.

## **11 Vitebsk**

Provincial town in the Russian Empire, near the Baltic Republics, with 66,000 inhabitants at the end of the 19th century; birthplace of Russian Jewish painter Marc Chagall (1887-1985).

## **12 Communal apartment**

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

**13** NKVD: People’s Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

#### **14 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.

#### **15 Chagall, Marc (1889-1985)**

Russian-born French painter. Since Marc Chagall survived two world wars and the Revolution of 1917 he increasingly introduced social and religious elements into his art.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 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.

#### **18 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.

#### **19 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.

## **20 Enemy of the people**

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

## **21 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.

## **22 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees**

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

## **23 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.

## **24 Kursk battle**

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

## **25 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.

## **26 Mestkom**

Local trade-union committee.

## **27 Königsberg (since 1946 Kaliningrad)**

6th April 1945: the start of the Königsberg offensive, involving the 2nd and the 3rd Belorussian and some forces of the 1st Baltic front. It was conducted in part of the decisive Eastern Prussian operation (the purpose of this operation was the crushing defeat of the largest grouping of German fascist forces in Eastern Prussia and the northern part of Poland). The battles were crucial and desperate. On 9th April 1945 the forces of the 3rd Belorussian front stormed and seized the town and the fortress of Königsberg. The battle for Eastern Prussia was the most blood shedding campaign in 1945. The losses of the Soviet Army exceeded 580 thousand people (127 thousand of them were casualties). The Germans lost about 500 thousand people (about 300 of them were casualties). After WWII, based on the decision of the Potsdam Conference (1945) the northern part of Prussia including Königsberg was annexed to the USSR (the southern part was annexed with Poland).

## **28 War with Japan**

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8th August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

## **29 Medal for Military Merits**

awarded after 17th October 1938 to soldiers of the Soviet army, navy and frontier guard for their 'bravery in battles with the enemies of the Soviet Union' and 'defense of the immunity of the state borders' and 'struggle with diversionists, spies and other enemies of the people'.

## **30 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.

## **31 Medal for Capture of Königsberg**

Established on 9th June 1945. The medal was awarded to all servicemen who were directly involved in the capture of Königsberg as well as for the officers who lead the operations. Over 752 thousand medals were awarded.

## **32 Medal for Victory over Germany**

Established by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the glorious victory, 15 million awards.



### **33 Medal for Victory over Japan**

Established on 30th September 1945 by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the victory over Japan. 1 million 818 thousand awards.

### **34 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

### **35 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)**

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

### **36 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

### **37 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.

### **38 Shtern, Lina (1878-1968)**

physiologist, professor, academician of the AS of the USSR and AMS of the USSR. Graduated from Geneva University and worked there at the Department of Physiology and Chemistry. Shtern was the first female professor at Geneva University. She lived in the USSR since 1925, was head of the Department of Physiology of Moscow State University and director of the Institute of Physiology that she organized. Shtern was the first female academician in the AS USSR. In 1941 she was elected to the presidium of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. In 1949 she was arrested for participation in the committee. She was rehabilitated in 1953.

### **39 Sakharov, Andrey Dimitrievich (1921-1989)**

Soviet nuclear physicist, academician and human rights advocate; the first Soviet citizen to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (1975). He was part of the team constructing the Soviet hydrogen bomb and received the prize 'Hero of the Socialist Labor' three times. In the 1960s and 70s he grew to be the leader of human rights fights in the Soviet Union. In 1980 he was expelled and sent to Gorkiy from where he was allowed to return to Moscow in 1986, after Gorbachev's rise to power. He remained a leading spokesman for human rights and political and economic reform until his death in 1989.

### **40 October Revolution Day**

October 25th (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7th.

### **41 Soviet Army Day**

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23rd, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

### **42 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

### **43 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By

1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

#### **44 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.