

Henrich Kurizkes

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I took this interview with Henrich Kurizkes at his home. The Kurizkes family live in a nice nine storey apartment building in a new district of Tallinn. They have a two-room apartment. There are lots of books and pot plants in his apartment. Henrich and his wife Miriam live in this apartment. Their daughter and her family live in Vilnius and their son lives in Israel. Henrich is a man of average height, with a military bearing. He has a short haircut, dark and gray hair and bright dark eyes. Henrich is a great communicator. He and his wife Miriam, a charming miniature lady with short gray hair and amazing bright brown eyes, are very close and seem to understand each other without words. They are very hospitable and friendly and I had a feeling of having known them for a long time. They gave me a pot maple tree and looking at it brings back the memory of these wonderfully nice people.

[Family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the War](#)

[After the War](#)

[Glossary](#)

Family background

My father's family lived in Narva [200 kilometers east of Tallinn], a town in Estonia. Narva is on the border with Russia and the majority of its residents spoke Russian. In my father's family they spoke Yiddish and Russian.

My paternal grandfather's common name [1](#) was Yefim Kurizkes. Of course, he had a Jewish name as well. I think it was Haim. My grandmother's name was Miriam, but I don't know her maiden name. They were both born in Estonia, but I don't know where exactly. I know very little about my grandfather, while I knew my grandmother quite well.

I don't have any information about what my grandfather did for living. As for my grandmother, she had her own business selling paper that she purchased somewhere in Russia. My grandmother made tours of offices and shops offering her commodity and receiving orders. Her assistant delivered paper on a cart. Of course, one couldn't become rich from this business, but my grandmother provided quite well for the family.

My father's parents had three children. The oldest girl's name was Raya, my father Lazar, born in 1894, came next, and the youngest was his sister Rosa.

My father's parents were not Orthodox Jews, but they observed all Jewish traditions in the family. In those times it was impossible to imagine a Jewish family that didn't celebrate the Sabbath or Jewish holidays and didn't raise their children as Jews. My grandfather and grandmother went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

I don't know what kind of education my father's sisters received. My father moved to Vilnius, where some distant relatives lived, after finishing a Russian general education school. He entered the Faculty of Pharmacology of Vilnius University. There was a Jewish quota [2](#) in Russian higher educational institutions at the time. It constituted 5 percent of the total number of students. My father was lucky to get into this 5 percent quota. During his studies he lived with his relatives. I don't know anything about the time when my father was a student.

Upon graduation my father returned to Narva, where he couldn't find a job. My father moved to Tallinn, but there was no job in his specialty there either. There were no vacancies in bigger pharmacies, and my father couldn't afford to start his own pharmacy. He lost any hope of finding a job in his specialty and went to work as a shipment forwarder for a few factories. He delivered their products to many stores in Estonia on a car.

My father's sisters got married. Raya's husband's surname was Mogilkin. Rosa's husband came from the wealthy Jewish family of the Klompuses. Of course, Raya and Rosa had Jewish husbands; it couldn't have been otherwise at the time. They both had traditional Jewish weddings. Both sisters' husbands came from Tartu and they moved there to live with their husbands. My father's older sister Raya had a daughter named Genia and a son named Boris. Rosa had a son called Anatoliy.

During World War II Raya and her family were evacuated. After the war they returned to Tartu. Raya died in the 1970s and her daughter died in the late 1990s. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tartu. Raya's son, Boris is still alive. He's a doctor, and lives in Tver [Russia, 400 kilometers from Moscow]; his surname is Mogilevskiy. I'll tell the story of my father's sister Rosa later.

After my father moved to Tallinn and his sisters got married, my grandfather and grandmother moved to live with my father in Tallinn. My grandfather died in Tallinn in 1920. He was buried following the Jewish tradition in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. After my grandfather died my grandmother lived in Tartu, in her daughter Raya's home. My grandmother died in the late 1930s. She was also buried following the Jewish tradition in the Jewish cemetery in Tartu.

My mother's family lived in Tallinn. My maternal grandfather's name was Yankl Schulkleper and my grandmother's name was Hana. I don't know where and when my grandfather or grandmother were born, but their children were born in Tallinn. The oldest in the family was my mother's older brother Marcus Schulkleper. He was called Max in the family. The second son was Abram and then came Iosif and David. Then my mother's sister Polina was born. My mother Revekka, born in 1896, was the last child in the family.

My maternal grandfather and his family rented the upper floor in a private two storey building owned by the Shumann Jewish family. I knew this family well. Doctor Moishe Shumann was our family doctor. His two single sisters lived with him.

My mother's family was religious like all Jewish families. They observed Jewish traditions, celebrated the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Of course, all of my mother's brothers had had a bar mitzvah. On holidays my grandmother, grandfather and their children went to the synagogue. They spoke Yiddish and all the members of the family were fluent in German and Russian.

I don't know where my grandfather worked. He died long before I was born. Unfortunately, I don't remember my grandmother. She died in 1926, when I was one and a half. They were both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

My mother's brothers and sister had a secular education. My mother graduated from a Russian high school in Tallinn. I don't know why my mother's parents chose this Russian high school. It was an eleven-year course. It provided a good and solid knowledge of the subjects the children studied. My mama spoke fluent German and could read in French.

My mother's oldest brother Marcus married Tauba, a Jewish girl. They had two daughters: Debora, born in 1909, and Mirah, born in 1915. Marcus was engaged in commerce and his wife was a housewife. Marcus' brother Iosif also worked with him. Iosif was married; his wife's name was Genia. Their daughter Sterna was born in the late 1910s.

Abram owned a fabric store. Somehow Abram went bankrupt in the late 1920s. It must have been a hard blow for him and he died in the early 1930s. Abram's wife's name was Ester; his daughter's name was Sara. During World War II, Ester and Sara were evacuated, then they came to Tallinn. Ester died in Tallinn in the 1960s.

I didn't know my mother's younger brother David. He died before I was born. My mother's sister Polina married Vigura, a Polish man, and they moved to Katowice in Poland.

My parents got married after my father moved to Tallinn. They got acquainted at a party and got married in 1922. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. All local Jews had traditional weddings. Wealthy or poor, there was a chuppah and a ketubah issued by a local synagogue. Religion was an integral part of the life of Jewish families at the time.

There was a large Jewish community in Tallinn. There were many wealthy Jews, big businessmen and store owners. They contributed significant amounts of money to charity. There were Jewish craftsmen: tinsmiths, barbers and tailors. There were many Jewish lawyers, doctors and teachers. When Estonia gained independence [3](#), and the first Estonian Republic [4](#) was established, the higher educational institutions canceled the Jewish quota and Jews got greater access to higher education.

The Jewish community was very proud of the Tallinn synagogue [5](#). Built at the end of the 19th century, it was very beautiful.

There was no Jewish neighborhood or Jewish street in Tallinn. Jewish houses were scattered all across the town. There were wealthier houses in the central part of the city where land was more expensive, and the poorer settled down in the suburbs.

Jews faced no anti-Semitism in Estonia. In 1926 the Jewish Cultural Autonomy [6](#), giving more extensive rights to Jews, was established. There were various Jewish organizations in Tallinn, including the Women's Zionist Organization, WIZO [7](#), children's and young people's organizations, such as Betar [8](#) and Hashomer Hatzair [9](#), the Maccabi sport club [10](#) and others. Jews enjoyed many

freedoms.

Growing up

After getting married, my parents rented an apartment in the house owned by Sweetgauer, a Jewish man. My father worked and my mother was a housewife. I was born in 1924, and I was the only child in the family. Shortly after I was born my parents moved to Raua Street, near where their parents lived. We lived there until the town authorities decided to build a fire station on that site. The house was to be removed, and my parents rented an apartment nearby. We lived in this apartment until the very start of the Great Patriotic War [11](#).

We spoke Yiddish and Russian at home. My parents mostly spoke Russian to me, but it took me no time to pick up some Yiddish. Children are good at languages.

The Tallinn Jewish gymnasium [12](#) was located not far from our home and my father wanted me to study in this school. However, I fell very ill when I was six. I had an inflammation of the ear which led to complications with a blood infection. There were no antibiotics at the time, but the doctors managed to cure me. Having spent a while in the hospital, I couldn't attend the Jewish kindergarten where children studied the basics of Hebrew.

The director of the school refused to admit me to the Hebrew class without my knowing Hebrew. He suggested that I went to the Yiddish class. I knew Yiddish well, but my father was against it. Maybe the Yiddish class, in my father's opinion, was associated with Yiddishists [13](#), and he quite disapproved of them. So I went to the private Russian school.

When I was in 2nd grade, my mother went to work as an accountant in an office. After I studied for four years in the Russian school, Estonian authorities issued an order directing all non-Estonian children to study either in their own language, or in an Estonian school. So I had to quit my Russian school and my parents sent me to a private English college. It was expensive, but they wanted to give me a good education.

This was actually an Estonian school with advanced study of the English language. We also studied German. Boys and girls studied together. Some of my former classmates also came to this college. They were children of wealthy parents. Some of the girls, also my former classmates, went to a private Estonian school for girls. I kept seeing my friends even after we went to different schools.

We wore uniforms at school: grey suits and light colored shirts. They were made by individual orders. There were no poor children in our college. There were also many Jewish children in college. We never faced any anti- Semitic demonstrations from our Estonian schoolmates. Jewish children were well respected at school. Our tutor always told Jewish children about the forthcoming Jewish holiday and we were allowed to stay away from school on this day.

All of my school friends were Jewish. Of course, some of my friends were Estonian. We used to play football with Estonian boys, our neighbors. However, we never visited them at home. My real close friends were Jewish. I don't know how it happened to be this way. All I can say is that my parents never put any pressure on me in this respect. This was my choice. This was the way it happened to be.

My parents were moderately religious. Of course, all Jewish traditions were well observed in our household. Mama followed kashrut. She only bought meat from a Jewish butcher. She also bought hens at the market to take them to the shochet. The shochet worked near the synagogue. Mama took care of the housework even when she went to work.

My father didn't follow the requirement to do no work on the Sabbath. Saturday was another working day for him. However, we followed all the rules on Jewish holidays. Mama kept special dishes for Pesach. They were only used once a year, on Pesach. Also, when these special dishes were not enough, our everyday utensils were koshered in a rather complicated way, so that they could be used on Pesach as well. I remember that they had to be soaked in water for at least a week. [Editor's note: only certain dishes and utensils can be koshered, and this is done in different ways, depending on the material. However, there is no tradition of soaking dishes for a week in order to kosher them]

There was a sweet shop in our street. It was owned by Genovker. There was a cookie shop, which was thoroughly cleaned before Pesach to be used for making matzah. My father's acquaintance Yitzhak supervised the process of matzah making. I remember him showing me how a thoroughly rolled piece of dough was put in an electric stove, and the baked matzah came out the other end. Then this matzah was sold at the synagogue and my parents always bought a lot to have sufficient matzah for the holiday. There was no bread at home at this period, and we only ate matzah.

There was a tradition to have two seder evenings on Pesach: one on the first and another one on the second day of the holiday. We always visited my mother's older brother Marcus on these seder nights. He had a big apartment. My mother's brothers all got together with their wives and children. We sat at a big table and Marcus conducted the seder according to all the rules.

My parents fasted on Yom Kippur. The children could have food, but adults strictly followed the rules. [Editor's note: children under the age of 12 for girls and 13 for boys are not required to fast.] My father was a heavy smoker, but on Yom Kippur he didn't even approach his cigarettes for a whole day and night.

My parents had their seats at the synagogue. My father bought nice seats for himself and mama. My father didn't know Hebrew. He had a thick prayer book in Yiddish and German. On Yom Kippur, my friends and I went to the synagogue with our fathers. I was standing beside my father on the ground floor while mama and the other women were on the upper tier.

Later we, the kids, left the synagogue and headed to somebody's home. The households were wealthy and there were cooks in the families, and we were always greeted by a cook: 'Hey, kids, come on over! You must be starving!' and they treated us to all kinds of delicious food. We also celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Chanukkah and Purim following all Jewish traditions.

As for the holidays organized by the Jewish community in Tallinn, I only remember Simchat Torah. The community arranged a celebration at the synagogue. The children wore carnival costumes and had little torches. We danced and sang and ran. There were also some treats and it was a lot of fun. There were also concerts and performances at the Jewish school on Jewish holidays. Of course, we attended them. All Jewish children knew each other. Tallinn wasn't that big: there were 120,000 residents in the town before the war and about 5,000 were Jews.

I was a member of the Jewish organization for young people, Hashomer Hatzair: 'The Young Watchman.' We had meetings every week. We were told about the history of the Jewish people, and we also had quizzes, tests and various games. We always had a good time there. Besides, from 1937, every Saturday night, all Jewish children who didn't go to the Jewish school, visited Doctor Aba Gomer [14](#), the Rabbi of Tallinn, and he taught us Jewish history and traditions. Aba Gomer was a Doctor of Philosophy, a very intelligent and interesting man. I enjoyed those Saturday nights with Doctor Gomer much. He spoke to us for an hour and then the rebbetzin, his wife, treated us to tea and cakes.

I was to turn 13 in 1937. Don Shatz, my father's good friend and a very religious man, who went to the synagogue twice a day, started preparing me for my bar mitzvah. I had classes with him at his home every day. I learned a piece from the Torah, but I had to chant it when I had no voice or ear for singing. So I was allowed to recite it. I would say, I had a bar mitzvah and a concert that day. Misha Alexandrovich, a wonderful singer and cantor, conducted the service at the synagogue. He had studied singing in Austria and the cantor of Riga paid for his studies. In the evening we had a celebration for my bar mitzvah. Our apartment was small so we got together at my uncle Iosif's home. He lived in a big apartment near the central park in Tallinn.

When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 [15](#), the local Germans that were numerous in Estonia increased their activities. Almost all Germans in Estonia were wealthy people. There were schools for German people. They didn't mix with other nationalities. When Estonian Jews heard about the persecution of Jewish people in Germany and that Jewish residents were chased away from their homes and sent to concentration camps, they were deeply concerned. This started the movement of passive protest. Jews stopped buying German food products or clothes and didn't go to German movies. In 1939, when Soviet military bases were established in Estonia [16](#), Hitler appealed to all Germans to move to their Motherland and many Estonian Germans left the country.

In 1939 German forces invaded Poland [17](#). We obtained information about the military operations from the Finnish, German and English radio programs. There were the 'lightning' bulletins displayed in shop windows with information about the military progression. This short-term war brought grief into our family. Germans killed my mother's older sister Polina Vigura, amongst other Jews in Katowice. I know no details of this tragedy.

Soon the Soviet army liberated Poland. After he failed to invade Poland, Hitler decided to share it with Stalin. According to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [18](#), the Baltic territory was under the influence of the USSR. We had no information about this pact at the time. We only heard about it after World War II. Upon execution of this pact, Estonia remained independent for about half a year, though the Soviet army invaded Estonia in 1939; but the explanation was that due to aggravation of the military situation in the world, the Soviet forces were to be based in Estonia to secure its border. The Soviet forces constituted 25,000 military, while the Estonian army amounted to 15,000 soldiers and officers.

I remember well the events of 1940, before Estonia was annexed to the USSR [19](#). The Soviet army openly entered Estonia. They expected no resistance. In towns, the Soviet military installed stages where Soviet ensembles performed dancing and singing. However, they were not allowed to communicate with the locals. The communists, who were working underground in Estonia, organized a rally of workers in Tallinn. This was a time of economic crisis and unemployment in

Estonia. Unemployment is always bad for people. One could go to any extreme fearing losing one's job. I remember how my parents feared to receive a notice of dismissal from work each time they went to receive their wages.

My friends and I went to watch the rally. The workers were carrying the slogan 'We want bread and work!' They went to the government headquarters demanding resignation of the government with the President of Estonia at its head. On both sides their rows were demonstratively guarded by Soviet armored cars and tanks. When they came to the government building, carrying posters and chanting slogans, it was announced that the government had resigned. The new government was appointed and shortly afterward the State Duma was dismissed and elections to the Supreme Soviet [20](#) were conducted. The Estonian army was dismissed. All political parties were forbidden, except for the communist party, which became legal.

Then the new government announced the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and appealed to the Soviet government with the request to annex Estonia to the USSR. On 6th August 1940 Estonia was annexed to the USSR. The majority of residents had a negative attitude to this fact, but there was too much fear to openly protest.

The Soviet power established in Estonia dropped an iron curtain [21](#) around Estonia. It actually existed in the USSR from the moment of its appearance. Boats and planes to Finland were canceled. It was not allowed to communicate with relatives living in other countries [22](#). However natural it might have been for Soviet residents, we found it strange. Struggle against religion [23](#) began. Religious classes at schools were canceled and we were not allowed to celebrate religious holidays.

Nationalization of banks and commercial and industrial enterprises began. There were commissars [24](#) appointed to each enterprise. The commissars, who were from the Soviet military, went to stores and factories, took keys and documents from their owners and dismissed them. There was no reimbursement offered to owners. They were just informed that from then on his or her property belonged to people, and that they needed no assistance in accounting the commodities. Some workers and other employees were allowed to keep their jobs. The result was that some Estonian residents were for and others were against the Soviet power.

My parents had a rather loyal attitude toward the Soviet power. They had no property and had not lost anything. They kept their jobs and were no longer afraid of losing their jobs. They received the same salary for their work while all prices dropped significantly after Soviet power was established. So we could afford a lot more and there were many new food products supplied to stores; for example, concentrated milk in tins, tinned crab meat and Georgian wine. So our life improved with Soviet power. However, my parents were skeptical about the very idea of communism. They thought it was nothing more than utopia, and that the idea would never be implemented.

My college was closed in 1940. I had finished nine grades by then. All schoolchildren went to the secondary school located in the building of the gymnasium. My other Jewish friend and I didn't want to go to this school. We went to the former private Russian school, which was also turned into a state-run school. We could speak and read Russian, but we knew no grammar and couldn't write in Russian. My friend's father taught us during the summer and we happened to be well-prepared for school. In June 1941 we finished 10th grade. We were to study one more year.

During the War

14th June 1941 is a memorial date for all Estonian residents. At night the Soviet authorities deported Estonians [25](#). The lists for deportation were ready before night. They included the wealthier Estonian, Jewish and Russian residents. Soviet authorities had access to all banking documents and had no problems finding the wealthier residents. Estonian communists also took part in generating the lists and I suspect many people were included in the lists for personal dislikes or jealousy. There were also some suspected of a disloyal attitude to the Soviet power, political activists of the pre-Soviet epoch, wealthy farmers and also those whose residence seemed attractive to the newcomers on these lists.

A truck with NKVD [26](#) soldiers drove to a house, people were given limited time to get packed and that was it. Trains waited at the railway station. Men were separated from their families. They were sent to the Gulag [27](#), and members of their families were moved to Siberia. In total about ten thousand people were deported on 14th June. This was quite a significant number, particularly considering that the total population in Estonia accounted to one million people.

My mother's younger sister Rosa, whose marital surname was Klompus, was also on those lists. The Klompus family was probably one of the wealthiest families in Tartu. My aunt's husband's father owned a whole neighborhood of apartment buildings and also had some other property. In his will he assigned his property to Wolf, my aunt's husband. He said that his other sons would either drink or gamble it away. So, in the end only Wolf, Rosa and their son Anatoliy were deported.

Wolf was in a camp, and Rosa and her son ended up in a remote village in the Tomsk region. The nearest railway station was a day's sailing along the river. Wolf was rehabilitated in the 1950s [28](#). He returned to Estonia and settled down in Piarnu. He was an economist and got a job and received an apartment. When Anatoliy finished school in exile, my parents wanted him to come and stay with us, but he entered a college in Tomsk and stayed there. He and Rosa moved to Piarnu after he finished his studies. Rosa developed a heart disease after all her sufferings, and died a few years later. Her heart failed her. Anatoliy was also a sickly person. The exile and lack of food when he was a child affected him.

After Rosa died her husband lived with Anatoliy. Anatoliy got married and had a daughter. We visited them occasionally. After Anatoliy became a pensioner he moved to Tallinn. His daughter and her family moved to Boston, USA, in the 1980s. In the 1990s, when Estonia was already independent, the Klompus family's property in Tartu was returned to them. Anatoliy went to visit his daughter and the following day he died suddenly from heart failure. The Boston Jewish community buried him according to Jewish traditions.

I went to work as a pioneer leader [29](#) in a pioneer camp during the summer. The camp was located about 15 kilometers from Tallinn. I was to start on 15th June. We had just settled down, when on Sunday night of 22nd June 1941 we heard the roar of the artillery cannonade. It never occurred to us that it was a war. We thought it was another military training exercise. Then at noon, on 22nd June, we heard the Molotov [30](#) speech on the radio, and he said that Hitler's armies had attacked the USSR.

We returned to Tallinn where evacuation began and my parents decided to evacuate. Thank God, they didn't delay. Many Estonian and Jewish people didn't fear Germans as much as they did the

Soviet power after the tragic deportation experience. This day played another tragic part in the life of Estonian Jews. Even before the German occupation, Estonians began to destroy the Jewish people. Estonia was one of the first European countries to report to Hitler that its territory was free, judenfrei, [31](#) from Jews. Hatred toward the Soviet power was so strong that it out-weighed all historical dislike of Germans by Estonians. The Germans were seen as liberators and rescuers, and Estonians were ready to fulfill all of their orders.

There were hardly any Jewish survivors in Estonia after the war. Even those who had been deported to Siberia had more of a chance of survival than those who refused to leave their homes. People thought that they would wear yellow stars, if the Germans wanted them to, and speak German and go along with the Germans. They all perished, but it wasn't until after the war that we heard about the Klooga concentration camp [32](#), mass shootings of Jews and other horrors.

Meanwhile my mother and father packed some belongings and we headed to the railway station. My father worked in the military supply store [department responsible for food and commodity supplies to military units and organizations of the town], and was to take care of transportation of its stock. My parents decided to go on separately rather than wait for one another.

Evacuation was organized from the very start of the war. There were freight trains at the freight station in Tallinn that moved on when they were full. We evacuated on 3rd July 1941. After our train crossed the bridge over the Narva River, the bridge was destroyed. We were told that all Estonians were to be evacuated to Ulianovsk where the government of Estonia had been evacuated [33](#). We traveled for about three weeks. We had some food and clothes with us. We were lucky since some business organizations were traveling on our train and we could buy everything we needed from them: cookies, butter, tinned meat and fish. So we had sufficient food on the train.

We reached Yelanskaya station between Sverdlovsk and Cheliabinsk. The station was ready to receive people. Horse-drawn wagons from nearby kolkhozes [34](#) were waiting at the station. We were taken to the local school to be distributed to kolkhozes. We were sent to a kolkhoz 30 kilometers from the district town of Dolmatovo in Kirov region, about 1000 kilometers north-west of Moscow.

Mama and I went to work in the kolkhoz. It was August and I was to go to school in September and we returned to Dolmatovo. Mama went to work as an accountant in the kolkhoz supplying cabbage, carrots and potatoes to the pipe factory in Kamenets-Uralskiy. During the war this factory manufactured cannon guns. We rented a room in a wooden hut. There were two rooms with a Russian stove [35](#) between them in this hut. There was no door, the rooms were separated by a curtain of some kind.

My father found us there. He had been evacuated to Stalingrad with his store stocks. There he met some acquaintances from Tallinn who corresponded with their relatives, and my father found us through them. My father stayed with us and went to work as an electrician at the power plant in Dolmatovo. He also worked as an electrician at the military school located in an old monastery building.

Our first winter was very hard for us. We had no warm clothes with us. We had been told that the war wasn't going to last longer than one or two months, and that we didn't need many clothes. I had a pair of light boots that I wore through that severe winter in the Ural. We also didn't have

sufficient food. It was good that we were given lunches at school and had bread cards from the card system [36](#), though bread was not provided each day. In spring our landlords gave us a plot of land and we planted potatoes to have them through the winter.

I was in the 10th grade at school. Most of my classmates were evacuated from Moscow, mainly they were children of politicians and about half of them were Jews. I did well at school. I even did better than those children from Moscow, which was amazing. In June 1942 I finished 10th grade and received the school certificate.

In the summer I worked in haymaking in the kolkhoz, and in September 1942 I was recruited to the army. My father was recruited a year later, but he was sent to the front before me. He was a driver for the medical battalion of the Estonian Corps [37](#). I was sent to a reserve regiment where we were trained in military operations. The regiment was deployed near Kamyshov in the Ural.

We started making earth huts, cutting wood and carrying it to the construction site. We had wagons, but no horses and we pulled those wagons loaded with logs. We had to pull it uphill and one day some big boss visited the regiment and, seeing us, said that people were not horses and were not supposed to drag wagons. As a result, we had to carry the logs on our shoulders instead.

We had eight hours' training each day. We were trained in shooting, disassembling and stripping weapons, crawl and running. We did our best knowing that perhaps our life was at stake at the front and everything depended on our skills. In fall 1943 we were sent from there to the infantry at the front.

The Estonian Corps was a blessing for us Estonians, since before it was established Stalin was sending all Estonian recruits to the labor army [38](#), where they starved, froze and worked to death, and their only hope to survive was this Estonian Corps. I think that many of us were lucky to survive serving in the Estonian Corps. We understood each other without words, had a similar mentality and spoke one language.

Our front line life started near Leningrad in siege [39](#). These were our first battles. When the siege was broken, we went into the city and from there we were to march on. I remember when we were in the city. We saw exhausted and starved women wearing cotton or wool coats, with their heads and faces wrapped in kerchiefs, repairing streetcar tracks, removing brick debris formed by destroyed houses. They were models of courage for us. It was fearful to see piles of dead bodies. It's scary to think about how many people had died during the siege of Leningrad. The suburbs of the city were in ruins. Then we headed to Estonia. We were on our way to liberate our fatherland from the fascists.

In February 1944 the crossing of the Narva began. There were violent battles for the Narva. There were Estonian SS military personnel in the Narva and they had nowhere to retreat. The German commanders convinced them that they were sending assistance soon and they were to hold defense until new forces joined them. And they staged a holdout of this plan. Another desperate thing about these battles was that Estonians fought Estonians, the Estonian Corps of the Soviet army against the Estonian SS division. There were cases when members of one family were on opposite sides. The river was frozen, but the ice was scarlet with blood.

In summer 1944 we managed to destroy the enemy fortifications on the bank of the river. Our battalion took part in these battles, but I would like to emphasize that the main blow was struck by the penal battalion fighting beside us. They were sent into initial attacks, and, frankly speaking, they were just cannon fodder. If it had not been for them our casualties would have been many more. There were few survivors in those penal battalions. They had to fight in penal battalions until 'first blood,' until their first wound, and after the hospital they were assigned to common military units.

One can speak a lot about hardships at the front. We continuously moved from one location to another fighting on a beachhead for one or two weeks before moving to new positions. To begin with, we dug trenches. It's impossible to count how many we had dug. Of all tools we only had entrenching shovels. We started with digging a hole to hide the body before deepening it to the size fitting the height of the body. Then we dug a passage to the nearest neighbor and then it became easier to work. Then, when this trench was completed we were ordered to move to another location and then started all over again.

We slept in the open air for the most part. It was fine in summer, when one could fall asleep on the grass, but winter was worse. We slept in twos on one ground sheet and one top coat and used another ground sheet and top coat to sleep under them. We used our back packs as a pillow and gripped our machine guns so that nobody could take them away. When we woke up three hours later, we were covered with a heavy layer of snow.

There was artillery preparation before each battle. By the end of the war we had sufficient artillery units. At the very start of my experience at the front we had 45mm anti-tank cannon guns called 'Farewell, Motherland!' It took three men to roll it onto an open space. They shot tanks point blank. However, the tanks didn't wait to be shot at. Very often these three soldiers were killed immediately. Later we got antitank rifles and rocket missiles. Also there were more planes attacking the enemy's positions, followed by artillery preparation and then the infantry attacked shouting 'Hurrah! For the Motherland!'

I remember our first battles. We were to rise to attack and it was scary to get on and march ahead, but we knew that we had to march ahead and had to stop thinking that we might be killed at any moment. Later, with more experience, this fear lessened, but never disappeared. It's impossible to get used to such things. But then we would think about our field kitchen delivering food after a battle, which was quite a comforting thought to enjoy. Of course, there were delays with food supplies, particularly in spring and fall, when roads were impassable. At such times field kitchens had problems catching up with armed forces.

There were many more battles after the Narva. We were marching across the territory of Estonia, from the south of Estonia via Tallinn heading to the islands. The Germans must have envisaged that the end was approaching and were hurriedly running away from Estonia.

I remember the battle for Saaremaa Island, which was a strategic point, and our regiment was to capture it. I was in Battalion 3. Battalion 1 was the first one to be sent to the island. It consisted of the marines of the Baltic Fleet on marine boats. These boats were the first to attack. They were to land on the beachhead and later we were to join them there. This landing ended tragically. The boats delivered them to the shallow water and they thought it was the sandbank, but it was followed by deep water and they all drowned.

It happened this way. The night battle on Saaremaa was frightful. We reached our positions. It was pitch dark and we bumped into the Germans heading to their boats. Our attack was quite unexpected for them. This was my first face to face fighting. Of course, we had fought before, but we never knew who killed whom or how many people each of us killed. The main goal was to move ahead and destroy the enemy. Nobody cared whether the enemy was killed by a cannon shell or one's bullet. There were no emotions. It was like a shooting range, while there we were close to the enemy and besides, we had to fight in this inky darkness.

We didn't know Germans before we grabbed them. They had longer hair, whereas we had very short haircuts. We grabbed someone by his head and if we felt the longer hair we knew it must be a German soldier. We fought with whatever was at hand: bayonets, knives, rifle and machine gun butt stocks. I didn't have a feeling that I was killing human beings. There was some animal feeling of self-protection: you were fighting for yourself and for your life. There were no other emotions.

In early 1945 I was sent on a course for junior command staff. After finishing this training I was awarded the rank of junior lieutenant. When we were sent to Kurland I had a platoon under my command. The final combat actions in Kurland were the most violent. Our command was in a hurry to wrest the ground from the enemy and finish the war, while German forces were holding the lines and fighting desperately, supporting some of their units to give them a chance to evacuate.

We were moving ahead very slowly: fighting, shooting, wresting the ground from the enemy, advancing 50-100 meters and stopping again. The location was unfavorable and there was no shelter: grassy clearing, then a spot of wood and then an open clearing again. Even the wounded had to wait for rescue until night and they had to stay there bleeding, if they happened to have been wounded on an open grass clearing.

My close school friend was fighting in the neighboring regiment. During an attack he was wounded in his leg and had to stay in a swamp all day long. There was no way to pull him out. At night he was taken out and sent to the medical battalion and later he was sent to hospital. He was developing gangrene, and the hospital could offer no cure. He had his leg amputated beneath his knee to stop the gangrene.

We fought in Kurland, when we had some period of inactivity. Actually through April 1945 we were only engaged in training. We made earth huts and were having a rest. We knew the war was coming to an end. In early May, Estonian General Lieutenant Lembit Piarn, Corps Commander, visited us. He came from the family of Caucasian Estonians. These families moved to Georgia in the 19th century looking for a better life. We lined up and Piarn told us that in a few days we would receive a signal to begin combat action and we were to prepare ourselves to advance 7 kilometers within one and a half hours and wrest the ground from the enemy.

We started preparations and training in aimed shooting on the run and running. Then, on 8th May 1945 in the late afternoon, we were ordered to start the combat action. We started moving to our positions. The tanks were moving along the road and the infantry was following them. It was still light, when all of a sudden the tank column stopped and I saw a Willis car approaching us from the German front line. It stopped and a general came out. He approached the tanks and pronounced loudly: 'That's it, comrades! The war is over!' Later I heard that this was General Panyushkin. He had already visited the Germans and they had signaled their surrender.

It's hard to describe what it was like! We had night tracer bullets: a bullet flies and there is light behind it to see its direction. Everybody started shooting in the air and the sky was flashing. The tank corps commander asked the general's permission to remove the blackout from the tanks. The tanks had their lights closed with screens, but there was a small peephole left for the tank soldiers to manage their tanks since there were no night viewers available at that time. The general granted his permission and it became as light in the forest as during the day.

We were ordered to stay overnight in the forest. The field kitchen arrived shortly afterwards, so we ate and for the first time in a long time we were given 100 milliliters of vodka for dinner. We rested the following day, and there were Germans marching past us into captivity. They had no weapons and we were watching them. Then we were ordered to check that there were no Germans left in this 7 kilometer area that we were supposed to fight through the day before. What we saw was hair raising. Pine trees had been cut to knee height; their trunks with the branches were placed on the tree stumps. It was impossible to crawl underneath. There were German trenches with machine guns on them behind these pine trees. Even machine gun sites were covered with sand, such was the German accuracy. They had even had shooting practice on fixed ranges in advance, and our intelligence units failed to identify them. If we had had to fight, there would have been no survivors.

Throughout the duration of my fighting at the front I was wounded just once. It was a minor injury in my leg, the bone was not injured. I was sent to hospital and then returned to my unit.

We were not spoiled by awards in our Estonian Corps. I don't know why, but we didn't receive awards as often as they did in other units. I had two awards: Medal for Military Merits [40](#) and an Order for the Great Patriotic War [41](#) 2nd Grade. Later, after the war, I received awards dedicated to the Victory and Soviet army anniversaries.

There were commissars, political officers, in the Estonia Corps and in other units in the Soviet army. They conducted political training and engaged themselves in all proceedings. Of course, there were also SMERSH [42](#) officers, both Estonian and Russian ones. They were involved in hiring informers among us. We even knew some of these informers. A few of our soldiers were transferred to SMERSH and they were even awarded officers' ranks. I was lucky in this respect: they never tried to involve me.

SMERSH representatives were continuously mixing with the staff of the Estonian Corps, but they usually disappeared before combat actions. They preferred to watch the actions from a distance. We also had a rear unit in the Corps. They moved behind us and God forbid if a combatant decided to turn back: they were allowed to shoot and kill. Fortunately, there were no such cases in our regiment, though I came to the front at the turning point of the war. We never retreated. We advanced or stayed where we were, but we didn't retreat.

I joined the Party during the war. These were mass events, and officers were required to be party members. Our political officer convinced me to join. He was a very intelligent man. I wasn't eager to join the party, but nor did I mind.

I corresponded with my family throughout the war. It's amazing that the field post office worked without failure. A letter was folded into a triangle, the headquarters stamped it 'Red army free' and letters reached their addresses. Actually, letters took a long time to be delivered, particularly,

when the unit relocated. We had no return address, just a military unit number.

The combatants of the Estonian Corps were patriots. We did all we could, even unto death, to liberate Estonia from invaders. Jews of the Estonian Corps also struggled to stop fascists from exterminating Jews. We didn't have any information about the violent extermination of Jews in Estonia, but we knew about the persecution of Jews in Germany and we knew that Hitler wanted to exterminate Jews in Europe. We knew that it was our duty to stop this at whatever price.

After the War

After the war I was waiting for demobilization. I didn't contemplate my future being with the army. I wanted to enter the Law Faculty at the University and become a lawyer. Our Corps relocated to Estonia and we were deployed in the military quarters in Kloog. However, there were no lodgings for our battalion so we started building houses. We made the frame structure from pine and fur tree trunks, and constructed the walls from wooden lath. Later we relocated to Algvida, in the opposite direction from Tallinn, in the direction of Leningrad. We were staying in the woods, 7 kilometers from the station. We had to make earth huts to stay in.

Demobilization started for older people. I was an officer. I was told I was still young and had to serve in the army. I served in the Estonian Corps until 1949, when reorganization of the army began and the staff was to be reduced. This was also the start of the anti-Semitic campaign in the USSR: the process against cosmopolitans [43](#), and the murder of Mikhoels [44](#). After that reprisals in Estonia began. To tell the truth, when this happened there was more mention of the agricultural population. In the villages, the process of dispossession of wealthy farmers, the Kulaks [45](#) began. Of course, there were wealthier and poorer farmers in Estonia. Agriculture was well developed there; Estonia prospered from the export of butter, eggs and bacon. Denmark purchased butter and bacon was sold to England. Farming is hard work and all members of a farmer's family joined in this hard work. The Soviet power expropriated land from these people and granted it to the poor; rich country families were banished to Siberia.

I already knew that I was not going to become a staff officer so I got involved in the army finance division. I had no special education and had to learn this specialty on my own. The state anti-Semitism fed by the struggle against cosmopolitans was strengthening in the USSR and of course, it had its impact on me. In 1950, when the Estonian Corps still existed, they made the place too hot for me. They never tried to hide the fact that the reason for this was that I was a Jew. I requested demobilization, but they sent me to the Human Resources department of the Leningrad regiment, and from there to Tikhvin, in the St. Petersburg region [200 kilometers from St. Petersburg] where I was employed as a financier in the military enlistment office.

My parents returned to Tallinn from evacuation. They received a room to live in. My relatives also returned to their homes. My mother's brother Marcus and his daughters returned to Tallinn. His wife Taube died in evacuation in 1944. Marcus died in Tallinn in 1950. His daughter Debora has been living in Belgium since the 1920s. Then she moved to Israel. She died at the age of 93 in 2002 in Jerusalem. His second daughter Mirah lives in Jerusalem. She has turned 89. My mother's second brother Iosif died in evacuation. His daughter Sterna lived in Tallinn and died there in 2002. She was buried near her grandfather's grave in the Jewish cemetery of Tallinn.

I got married in 1950. I met my wife Miriam Patova when I was on service near Tallinn. We met at a Russian folk brass orchestra concert in the concert hall of Tallinn. A mutual friend introduced me to Miriam. Miriam was studying at school when I started seeing her. After finishing school Miriam went to Leningrad where she entered the Therapeutic Faculty of the Medical College. We corresponded and saw each other when she came home during vacations.

We got married during her winter vacation in 1950. Miriam's mother was severely ill at the time, and we had no wedding party. We registered our marriage and had a simple dinner with our parents in the evening. Only a year later, when Miriam came to Tallinn on winter vacation and I also had a short-term vacation we arranged a wedding party and invited our relatives. I visited Miriam in Leningrad. It was no problem for me to travel from Tikhvin on weekends.

Miriam was born in Tallinn in 1929. Her family lived in Rakvere [a town in northern Estonia, 20 kilometers south of the Gulf of Finland], but her mother came to Tallinn to give birth to her children. Miriam's father, Benjamin Patov, was born in Ukraine. He happened to come to the Baltic during World War I and then settled down there. Her mother Sheina, whose maiden name was Khazan, came from Riga. Miriam's father was a hat maker, and her mother assisted him in his work.

They had three children. Miriam's older sister Rachil, whose Jewish name was Rokhel-Leya, was born in 1920. The second child was a son, Beines, born in 1923. Miriam was the youngest of the three. The family was religious; they observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Miriam's brother had his bar mitzvah, when he turned 13, there was a big celebration of the event.

Miriam studied in an Estonian school where she studied German from the 1st grade. She was 12 when her sister moved to Tallinn and her brother followed shortly after. Miriam and her parents stayed in Rakvere. They were evacuated at the beginning of the war and returned to Tallinn after the war. Miriam's parents wanted her to continue her education, which was quite impossible in the small town of Rakvere.

Miriam's older sister Rachil lived in Tallinn, and her brother Beines perished at the very start of the war. He was a driver in Tallinn, and his boss ordered him to drive his car to Leningrad. Miriam's family was on the way to evacuation, when they met Beines in Kingisepp. He was on his way back to Tallinn. They were telling him to go with them, but he refused saying that he had an order to return to Tallinn. German forces were already entering the town when he arrived. Some Estonians captured him and killed him in the jail. Miriam's family obtained the archive documents of his death after the war.

Our daughter Tatiana was born in Leningrad on 9th January 1951. Miriam was a 4th-year student then. The day before the birth Miriam attended her lectures in college. Before our daughter turned one month old, Miriam brought her to Tallinn, stayed at home for a short time and returned to Leningrad. Miriam's mother took care of our daughter till Miriam graduated from college. My wife and I visited our daughter in Tallinn whenever we got a chance.

In 1953 I was relocated to Boxitogorsk, 25 kilometers north of Tikhvin. I relocated to work in a new military enlistment office. I received a nice one-bedroom apartment in a new house. Miriam also got a job in Boxitogorsk where she went to work as a children's doctor in the town hospital. We also

took our two and a half year old daughter to live with us.

On 5th March 1953 Stalin died. His name was an icon and Stalin was God for those born in the USSR who grew up with his name. I spent my youth in a different environment and was critical about Stalin's personality. We associated Stalin's name with everything happening in the USSR: cosmopolitan processes, the Doctors' Plot [46](#) and ever strengthening anti- Semitism. Of course, there was no information available, but we were not blind and we had an inner feeling that these were initiated by Stalin since he couldn't be unawares of whatever was happening.

My wife and I were horrified when Nikita Khrushchev [47](#) spoke at the 20th Party Congress [48](#) with the report on the cult of Stalin and his crimes. Only parts of his speech were published, even then there was a ban on information, but what we could read was sufficient for us to feel horrified, though we knew and sensed a lot. We knew it, because so many people were returning from the Gulag telling us what it was like. Of course, it was a shock.

Later we learned that if Stalin had not died, Jews would have been deported to Siberia or farther away. I wouldn't say that this shattered my trust in the Party. By then my membership in the Party became a pure formality for me. It was a requirement for making a career and nothing more.

We didn't stay long in Boxitogorsk. When reorganization of the army started I was invited to the HR department of the Leningrad military regiment where I was offered another position. They told me at once that there were no vacancies in Leningrad. I said I would not focus on Leningrad and they showed me the list of vacancies where I saw a position of Financial Manager in a hospital in Tallinn. I asked them to send me there. They said it was difficult to receive an apartment in Tallinn, but it didn't scare me and I was appointed to this position.

My parents lived in a one-room apartment, and Miriam's parents had three rooms in a shared apartment [49](#). Shared apartments were the invention of the Soviet regime. Before this we couldn't even imagine that people could share an apartment, being strangers to one another. We moved in with my wife's parents.

In 1956 our son Alexander was born. We didn't give our children Jewish names due to the Soviet environment. However, we never failed to observe Jewish traditions. Of course, there was a ban on them in those years, but we couldn't care less. Besides, it wasn't so hard in Estonia. For example, there were official supplies of matzah to Estonia from Riga or Leningrad. In the late 1980s, the Jewish community of Estonia [50](#) addressed the authorized representative on religion and the Estonian government provided flour for matzah for Pesach from its stocks. Perhaps this is why we have this attitude to the country and believe it to be our motherland.

Even through the most difficult postwar years and until 1990, we always had the Passover seder at home. Our friends visited us and we celebrated our holiday. The children were involved in the celebrations and knew what each holiday was about. They learned Jewish traditions and the history of the Jewish people. It was very natural for them. My son and daughter had many Jewish classmates. My wife and I never felt shy because we were Jews and felt no different from the others and our children knew and understood this.

The original Estonian residents had a different attitude toward Jews than the newcomers. Usually those who had moved to Estonia after it was annexed to the USSR had anti-Semitic attitudes while

Estonians thought that since they were persecuted and humiliated in the USSR like the Jews, they believed they were in a similar situation to the Jewish people. They believed us to be equal: Estonians were unhappy and so were Jews, so it was a good idea to support each other. We had many Jewish friends, but we also had Estonian and Russian friends. We didn't care about nationality, we believed human values were more important.

We also celebrated Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November [October Revolution Day] [51](#) and Victory Day [52](#). Of course, Victory Day was special for our family. We survived this horrible war and were happy about it. Other Soviet holidays were our days off and we took the opportunity to spend time with our children, have a fancy meal and socialize with friends. My wife and I worked and rarely had time with our children.

My wife and I appreciated the help and support of our mothers. My wife's mother raised our little daughter. When the children went to school my mother was taking care of them. She met them from school, made nice lunches and helped them with their homework. She always talked and discussed their problems with them. We were sure that our children were in good hands. My mother loved reading even when she grew old. We subscribed to a number of literary magazines and my mother was the first to read them. We spoke Russian with our children at home, but they also spoke fluent Estonian. They learned Estonian playing with Estonian kids in the yard.

My father died of cancer in Tallinn in 1963. He was buried according to Jewish tradition in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. My mother died in 1972 and we buried her near my father's grave. There are so many graves of our relatives in this cemetery. The Jewish cemetery survived even the occupation of Tallinn. Nothing was destroyed. It existed during the Soviet regime and it's still there. Now there is another problem. There is hardly any space left and soon there will be no space for new graves.

The army continued reducing their headcount. My position in the hospital was made redundant and I was offered the position of Pension Manager in the military enlistment office. I accepted the offer and worked in the military office for 26 years. I was promoted to Financial Pensions Manager. I had to improve my education. There was a Military Faculty in Moscow Financial Institute. I was on good terms with the Finance Department of the Ministry of Defense. These people knew me well and appreciated my performance. They gave me recommendations to the Institute, and in this case my nationality was no problem. I was an external student and traveled to Moscow to take exams.

I applied for resignation when I turned 60; it was difficult for me to work at this age. Even generals resign at 60. However, they didn't accept my resignation. They had to find a replacement, who knew Russian and Estonian to communicate with the institutions and ministries. Finally I started looking for a replacement myself and found an Estonian financial specialist working somewhere in Ukraine. I sent his information to the Ministry of Defense and they relocated him to Tallinn, whereupon I resigned. I started my service in the army in 1942 and resigned in 1985, having 43 years of service. One and a half years at the front accounted for three years. I receive the Russian military pension, which is more than the ordinary old age pension.

Our life in Estonia was different to everywhere else in the USSR. Of course, there were lines to buy any goods, even the essentials. But in general, the situation was different. The Baltic Republics produced good quality food products. There were tours of all Soviet stars and theaters. They liked traveling to the Baltic Republics. Our services and standard of living were higher than elsewhere.

Scientists, writers and poets had vacations in Piarnu and Tartu. We also had guests from Moscow and other towns. They were visiting 'Europe': Tallinn was Europe for them.

Tatiana entered the Faculty of Russian Philology at Tartu University after finishing school. Her lecturer was Lotman [53](#), and she also visited him at home. Even during the Soviet regime, Tartu was the only university in the USSR where Jews were not subject to any national discrimination. During her studies Tatiana married Rimantas Duda, a Lithuanian. Her marital surname is Dudiene. In 1976 her first son, Matas, was born and Tatiana became an external student. She finished her studies and in 1978 her second son, Simas, was born.

The majority of philology students became teachers, but Tatiana was not attracted to this. She went to work at the library in the polytechnic college. My daughter and her family live in Vilnius. She now has three grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, and soon there will be a fourth. My daughter and her family celebrate all Jewish holidays: Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. She follows all rules like we did in our household. Her sons and their wives respect Jewish traditions. They also celebrate Catholic traditions, for my daughter's husband.

Our grandchildren have Master's degrees. They graduated from the Academy of Arts in Vilnius, and the older grandson is working for his Doctor's degree. He is very modest and hardworking. He has a daughter, Ione, born in 2000, and a son, Povilas, who is one and a half years old. Simas has a daughter called Leya, who is three and a half years old. My daughter's family visits us every year and we visit them.

Alexander graduated from Tallinn Teachers' Training Institute. His specialty is 'Physics and vocational training.'. Upon graduation he was sent to work at a general education school. When a new, big vocational school opened in Tallinn, he was offered the position of teacher of physics and vocational training. He was a tutor in the electrical mechanics group. Alexander loves children and his job. He communicates with his students' parents. When his graduates received diplomas and school certificates they gave flowers to Alexander and thanked him for his effort. There were so many flowers that he had to take a taxi to bring them home. His students and their parents thanked him for his guidance.

My son married Margarita Rubinstein, a Jewish girl, born in Tallinn. Of course, my wife and I would have accepted any choice our son made, but the fact that he married a Jewish girl was very important to us. Margarita graduated from the Plumbers' Faculty of the polytechnic college with honors and worked at a design institute. She is very talented and draws well. Their first child, Rosa, was born in Tallinn in 1983.

In 1990 our daughter-in-law's family decided to move to Israel. It was her parents, her sister and her husband, and Margarita's uncle and his family. Alexander and Margarita also decided to move there. They needed our consent for their departure to be certified by the notary. We had no doubts about it and had all the necessary documents issued. Though we still worked and might have had problems resulting from their departure, we would never have done anything to jeopardize their happiness. Our son and his wife and daughter Rosa started taking Hebrew classes. Rosa did very well and in no time she was already helping them with the language. Our son's family settled in Ashdod. Our second granddaughter Esther was born in Israel in 1993.

Our granddaughters are very nice girls. Rosa is very talented and intelligent: she finished two years of the high school course in one year; she served in the army; she is a university student and also has a job. Esther studies in high school. My son's family is doing very well and I hope they will be all right in the future.

My family and I were very enthusiastic about the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 [54](#). I think it's a great joy for all Jews scattered all over the world that our state recovered after many thousands of years. When mass departures to Israel started in the 1970s, we supported those who decided to move there as much as we could and were happy to hear that they adapted to life in the newly gained country. A number of our relatives and acquaintances were among them. My cousin Mirah and her family left.

My wife and I didn't consider emigration. I was a professional military officer and after resignation I was not allowed to depart for ten years. Later my wife and I started thinking that we might never see our daughter and grandchildren again if we moved. We couldn't even imagine that we would be able to visit Israel or invite our relatives to visit us. So we stayed here. Our son and his family visit us and call us every week.

Miriam and I have also visited Israel. We took our first trip in 1994. Then we had another trip. I also attended the World Jewish Congress in Jerusalem. Israel made a wonderful impression on me. I felt at home there. Of course, there are problems, but this is common in all countries. What is most important is that this little prosperous country should live in peace.

I was rather positive about perestroika [55](#), initiated in the USSR by Mikhail Gorbachev [56](#) at the beginning. I was hoping that the USSR would become a really free and democratic country, and it looked so at first, but later I realized that these speeches were nothing but the camouflage for lack of action.

During the putsch [57](#) I followed everything that was going on. An airborne division arrived in Tallinn from Pskov in tanks and Soviet forces filled the town. Only the efforts of our government prevented bloodshed. It was a long trip from Pskov, and the troopers only had rationed food with them. Officers of the division were invited to the restaurant in the TV tower and the waiters were ordered to serve all the food they had available. A government representative went to the dairy where he ordered to deliver yogurts and cheese to the soldiers, and then they couldn't aim their guns at defenseless people. Meanwhile the breakdown of the USSR [in 1991] was announced. The officers of the Pskov division thanked the Estonians for their hospitality and departed to Pskov. Thus, there was no bloodshed.

I was very positive about the independence of Estonia [58](#). I remember life in Estonia before it was annexed to the USSR and I knew we would do well. Thank God, my hopes became true. Estonians are very accurate people, and it didn't take long before our life improved. My wife and I were too old to start our own business, but there are good opportunities for younger people.

The Jewish community of Estonia was established during perestroika. This was the first Jewish community in the former Soviet Union. I think our community plays a very important role in the life of Estonian Jews. For eight years, I was Chairman of the Audit Commission of the Jewish community where I put in a lot of effort. At first the Joint [59](#) assisted us a lot. The Joint resolved all social issues that we faced.

The community provides assistance to the lonely and elderly people. Many of them have lunches in the community, and the community delivers food to those who never leave their homes.

Community health workers do cleaning, washing and buy food for these people. These provisions are vitally important to many people.

Since Estonia joined the European Union, the Joint has reduced its financial assistance, as it has its restrictions: an American charity organization is not supposed to finance the European Union. Fortunately, the former Estonian Jew, Kofkin, living in Switzerland, now established the Kofkin Charity Fund in Estonia, and this fund provides assistance to the needy, supporting a number of social programs.

We celebrate all Jewish holidays and Victory Day in the community center. Victory Day is a holiday for all Jews in Europe. The community restored ownership of the former high school building and the children have the opportunity to get a Jewish education. These are wonderful things and there is much hope for the future.

Glossary:

1 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..

2 Five percent quota

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions couldn't exceed 5% of the total number of students.

3 Estonian Independence

Estonia was under Russian rule since 1721, when Peter the Great defeated the Swedes and made the area officially a part of Russia. During World War I, after the collapse of the tsarist regime, Estonia was partly conquered by the German army. After the German capitulation (11th November 1918) the Estonians succeeded in founding their own state, and on 2nd February 1920 the Treaty of Tartu was concluded between independent Estonia and Russia. Estonia remained independent until 1940.

4 First Estonian Republic

Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918,

they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918.

5 Tallinn Synagogue

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

6 Jewish Cultural Autonomy

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

7 WIZO

Women's International Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920 with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. A network of health, social and educational institutions was created in Palestine between 1921 and 1933, along with numerous local groups worldwide. After WWII its office was moved to Tel Aviv. WIZO became an advisory organ to the UN after WWII (similar to UNICEF or ECOSOC). Today it operates on a voluntary basis, as a party-neutral, non-profit organization, with about 250,000 members in 50 countries (2003).

8 Betar

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

9 Hashomer Hatzair

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

10 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A

growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

11 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.

12 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium

During the Soviet period, the building hosted Vocational School #1. In 1990, the school building was restored to the Jewish community of Estonia; it is now home to the Tallinn Jewish School.

13 Yiddishists

They were Jewish intellectuals who repudiated Hebrew as a dead language and considered Yiddish the language of the Jewish people. They promoted Yiddish literature, Yiddish education and culture.

14 Aba Gomer (?-1941)

born in Belostok, Poland, and graduated from the Department of Philosophy of Bonn University. He lived in Tallinn from 1927 and was the chief rabbi of Estonia. In 1941, he was determined not to go into Soviet back areas and remained on the German-occupied territory. He was killed by Nazis in the fall of 1941.

15 Hitler's rise to power

In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one- third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates. The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of

moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

16 Estonia in 1939-1940

on September 24, 1939, Moscow demanded that Estonia make available military bases for the Red Army units. On June 16, Moscow issued an ultimatum insisting on the change of government and the right of occupation of Estonia. On June 17, Estonia accepted the provisions and ceased to exist de facto, becoming Estonian Soviet Republic within USSR.R.

17 German Invasion of Poland

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

18 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

19 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

20 The Supreme Soviet

'Verhovniy Soviet', comprised the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union and the only one with the power to pass constitutional amendments. It elected the Presidium, formed the Supreme Court, and appointed the Procurator General of the USSR. It was made up of two chambers, each with equal legislative powers, with members elected for five-year terms: the Soviet of the Union, elected on the basis of population with one deputy for every 300,000 people in the Soviet federation, the Soviet of Nationalities, supposed to represent the ethnic populations, with members elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each of the 15 republic of the union, 11 from each autonomous republic, five from each autonomous region, and one from each autonomous area.

21 Iron Curtain

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

22 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.

23 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.

24 Political officer

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

25 Soviet Deportation of Estonian Civilians

June 14, 1941 - the first of mass deportations organized by the Soviet regime in Estonia. There

were about 400 Jews among a total of 10,000 people who were deported or removed to reformatory camps.

26 NKVD

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

27 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.

28 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

29 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.

30 Molotov, V

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

31 Judenfrei (Judenrein)

German for 'free (purified) of Jews'. A term created by the Nazis in Germany in connection with the plan entitled 'The Final Solution to the Jewish Question', the aim of which was defined as 'the creation of a Europe free of Jews'. The term 'Judenrein'/'Judenfrei' in Nazi terminology referred to the extermination of the Jews and described an area (a town or a region), from which the entire Jewish population had been deported to extermination camps or forced labor camps. The term was, particularly in occupied Poland, an established part of the official and unofficial Nazi language.

32 Klooga

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

33 Estonian Government in Evacuation

Both, the Government of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party were created in 1940 and were evacuated to Moscow as the war started. Their task was to provide for Estonian residents who had been evacuated or drafted into the labor army. They succeeded in restoring life and work conditions of many evacuees. Former leaders of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic took active part in the formation of the Estonian Rifle Corps assisting the transfer of former Estonian citizens from the labor army into the Corps. At the beginning of 1944, top authority institutions of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic were moved to Leningrad, and the permanent Estonian representation office remained in Moscow. In September 1944, Estonia was re-established as part of the USSR and the Estonian government moved to Tallinn.

34 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

35 Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults

in wintertime.

36 Card system

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

37 Estonian Rifle Corps

Military unit established in late 1941 as a part of the Soviet Army. The Corps was made up of two rifle divisions. Those signed up for the Estonian Corps by military enlistment offices were ethnic Estonians regardless of their residence within the Soviet Union as well as men of call-up age residing in Estonia before the Soviet occupation (1940). The Corps took part in the bloody battle of Velikiye Luki (December 1942 - January 1943), where it suffered great losses and was sent to the back areas for re-formation and training. In the summer of 1944, the Corps took part in the liberation of Estonia and in March 1945 in the actions on Latvian territory. In 1946, the Corps was disbanded.

38 Labor army

It was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war.

39 Blockade of Leningrad

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

40 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'.

41 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.

42 SMERSH

Russian abbreviation for 'Smert Shpionam' meaning Death to Spies. It was a counterintelligence department in the Soviet Union formed during World War II, to secure the rear of the active Red Army, on the front to arrest 'traitors, deserters, spies, and criminal elements'. The full name of the entity was USSR People's Commissariat of Defense Chief Counterintelligence Directorate 'SMERSH'. This name for the counterintelligence division of the Red Army was introduced on 19th April 1943, and worked as a separate entity until 1946. It was headed by Viktor Abakumov. At the same time a SMERSH directorate within the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Navy and a SMERSH department of the NKVD were created. The main opponent of SMERSH in its counterintelligence activity was Abwehr, the German military foreign information and counterintelligence department. SMERSH activities also included 'filtering' the soldiers recovered from captivity and the population of the gained territories. It was also used to punish within the NKVD itself; allowed to investigate, arrest and torture, force to sign fake confessions, put on a show trial, and either send to the camps or shoot people. SMERSH would also often be sent out to find and kill defectors, double agents, etc.; also used to maintain military discipline in the Red Army by means of barrier forces, that were supposed to shoot down the Soviet troops in the cases of retreat. SMERSH was also used to hunt down 'enemies of the people' outside Soviet territory.

43 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'.

44 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.

45 Kulaks

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

46 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.

47 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

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

48 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

49 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.

50 Jewish community of Estonia

On 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, a resolution was made to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first

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

51 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 is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

52 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.

53 Lotman, Yuri (1922-1993)

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

54 Creation of the State of Israel

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

continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

55 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.

56 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.

57 1991 Moscow coup d'etat

Starting spontaneously on the streets of Moscow, its leaders went public on 19th August. TASS (Soviet Telegraphical Agency) made an announcement that Gorbachev had been relieved of his duties for health reasons. His powers were assumed by Vice President Gennady Yanayev. A State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) was established, led by eight officials, including KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, and Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov. Seizing on President Mikhail Gorbachev's summer absence from the capital, eight of the Soviet leader's most trusted ministers attempted to take control of the government. Within three days, the poorly planned coup collapsed and Gorbachev returned to the Kremlin. But an era had abruptly ended. The Soviet Union, which the coup plotters had desperately tried to save, was dead.

58 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic

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

59 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

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